



# Meditations on Prayer

by

Rev. Edward E. Stelling



# **MEDITATIONS ON PRAYER**

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## The Author

Rev. Edward Stelling was Prayer Steward Secretary of the Washington Bible College since 1938 until he resigned in 1978. Each month he had written a letter on prayer which was sent to the prayer stewards of the college. In response to requests of various individuals three groups of these letters have been previously published under the title "Meditations on Prayer." The present booklet combines these former publications.

Rev. Stelling is now retired from full time evangelistic ministry and as former pastor of the Charleston Harbor Bible Church.

1938



1978

"MEN OUGHT ALWAYS TO PRAY  
AND NOT FAINT"

LUKE 18:1B

A TRIBUTE TO  
EDWARD E. STELLING  
IN RECOGNITION OF 40 YEARS AS  
PRAYER STEWARD SECRETARY

OF THE  
WASHINGTON BIBLE COLLEGE

BY  
PRAYER STEWARDS, ALUMNI,  
FACULTY, STAFF, STUDENTS  
AND  
TRUSTEES

## Foreword

From the beginning of my conversion in 1932, I have had an exceptional interest in both the experience and subject of prayer. Books on the theme of “prayer” and biographies of praying men of God have fascinated and challenged me.

In 1937, during a period when I and my first wife, who is now deceased, were serving as missionaries in the hills of Kentucky, George A. Miles, at that time President of the Washington Bible College, asked me to become Secretary of the Prayer Steward Department. I sought the Lord’s will and accepted fearfully the responsibility.

My systematic study of prayer (especially in the Scriptures) and a persistent search into the experience of it, has led me to a deep conviction as to its importance and practical value.

For 40 years I sent out a prayer letter each month to the prayer stewards of the College. The Lord has been pleased to bless these letters sent to our many readers. These letters were never intended to be printed. They are simply expressions of my heart and experience based upon the Word of God, written to encourage our prayer stewards.

Because, “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (II Timothy 3:16, 17), we believe that to be perfect in the holy exercise of prayer, or thoroughly furnished in prayer, we must study all that God’s Word reveals about prayer.

This booklet is a series of studies on the references to prayer and the records of prayers found in the Bible.

May it please Him who alone can teach us to pray, to use this booklet, thus drawing attention to His blessed instructions found in the unerring Word of God, and edifying His born-again-ones in the precious fellowship of prayer.

Rev. Edward E. Stelling

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## Introduction to “Meditations on Prayer”

From the very beginning, the Washington Bible College has been surrounded by a host of *prayer warriors* who have interceded on behalf of its needs. Edward W. Collamore, founder of the American Home Bible Institute which later united with the Washington School of the Bible and the Bible Institute of Washington to become the Washington Bible Institute, adopted the motto, “Knowledge, Prayer, Service.” Mr. Collamore had instituted a Prayer Department of the American Home Bible Institute which encouraged believers to become “prayer stewards.” Once a month, Mr. Collamore sent a prayer letter to these “prayer stewards” who prayed faithfully for the school. After the homegoing of Mr. Collamore, Thomas Manley edited these letters until the merger of the schools. Upon the merger in 1938, Rev. Ed Stelling was appointed Prayer Steward Secretary and served in this capacity until 1978.

When James wanted to illustrate the power of prayer, he pointed to a *practitioner*, not a *theorist*. He uses Elijah who *prayed earnestly*. Ed Stelling has been that kind of example to the friends of Washington Bible College. He not only taught us the place of priority that prayer ought to have in the believer’s life through his letters, but also through his life. His prayer life was a constant challenge to people around him that “*men ought always to pray and not faint.*”

Ed Stelling was also used of the Lord to enlist and motivate others to interceding on behalf of the needs of the Washington Bible College. Today, over 1800 Christians are members of the *Prayer Steward Fellowship*. The greatest need we have today is for more *prayer stewards*. I pray that God might touch your heart through these meditations so that you not only gain an understanding of prayer, but that you become one who practices it. May God raise up many more of His children to follow in the train of Ed Collamore, Thomas Manley, and Ed Stelling. “*Finally brethren, pray for us that the word of the Lord may have free course and be glorified.*”

Harry E. Fletcher, D. Min. President  
Washington Bible College  
Capital Bible Seminary



# **The Call To A Life of Prayer**

“Now it came to pass, as they went, that He entered into a certain village; and a certain woman named Martha received Him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, which also sat at Jesus’ feet, and heard His word. But Martha was much cumbered about much serving, and came to Him, and said, ‘Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? Bid her therefore that she help me.’ And Jesus answered and said unto her, ‘Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.’” Luke 10:38-42

There is a difference between a prayer life and a life of prayer. Every saint has a prayer life, but few have a life of prayer. The importance attached to prayer, and the time spent in prayer determine the difference. If you spend five minutes a week in prayer, you have a prayer life; though it be one you may well be ashamed of. If you live a life of prayer, it will be the preeminent part of your life, with an appropriate expenditure of time in it. This subject shall be divided into three headings: 1. A life of prayer chosen, 2. A life of prayer criticized, 3. A life of prayer commended.

## **A Life of Prayer Chosen**

“And Jesus...said...Mary hath chosen...” (Luke 10:42). The attention and time given to prayer by individuals and organizations abundantly testify that the Lord does not force anyone into a life of prayer. Although there may be individual experiences of extremity that drive men to call upon the Lord, the very nature of a life of prayer abhors such an atmosphere or relationship. This is a life the Lord permits the believer to choose, so that he enters in with willingness, freedom, joy and assurance. Now let us note the description of this life of prayer.

It is a life of fellowship with Christ - “Mary...sat at Jesus’ feet” (verse 39). Mary could have helped with the meal, having such an honored guest. She could have tried to make Jesus more comfortable. She could have sought to entertain Him. But she chose to sit at His feet. I John 1:3 “our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ.” Mary seemed to have grasped the truth of His teaching in Mark 10:45, “For even the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto but to minister.” The Lord is far more interested in ministering unto us than having us serve Him - “and He ordained twelve that they should BE WITH HIM” (Mark 3:14).

Nor was this a single recorded experience with Mary. For both Mark and John record her devotion to Christ and her spiritual understanding, when she poured ointment upon the Lord Jesus. We read in John 12:3 (and Mark. 14:3 is evidently the same incident), "Then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped His feet with her hair; and the house was filled with the odor of the ointment." Here again Martha served and Mary who sat at Jesus' feet, this time anointed both His head and feet with precious ointment. This speaks of the precious costly hours of worshiping our Lord Jesus Christ.

Still another time at Bethany, Lazarus had died. Jesus previously received a message from his sisters that he was sick, but waited two days until his death. When He arrived, jittery Martha ran to meet Him and even gently rebuked Him for not coming soon enough. "But Mary SAT STILL in the house" (John 11:20). Mary had learned peace and patience at His feet, as do all who spend much time in secret with Jesus alone. Yet when told "the Master is come and calleth for thee," then, "As soon as she heard that, she arose quickly and came unto Him." Those in a life of prayer may seem slothful in service, but when they are certain of His will they are the quickest to act. It is a fellowship through His Word (Luke 10:39), "and heard His word."

Prayer is two-way; fellowship is two-way, He speaks to us, and we speak to Him. There is no fellowship when one person does all the speaking, as in the conversation of some people. The Lord does not speak to us orally as He did to Adam, Abraham and Moses; nor through visions and trances as to Peter, Paul and John; but through the revelation of His Word mainly. Therefore, prayer includes more than worship, thanksgiving, petition, and intercession, in which we do the speaking, but it includes meditation upon the Word of God. And in this divine fellowship the Lord should speak first through His Word. We must be careful not to take our meditation in prayer a time of study. We must even avoid the use of devotional guides. Would you be satisfied to receive all your messages from your sweetheart through a messenger? Never to have a personal, direct contact? "And be ready in the morning, and come up in the morning...and present thyself there to Me in the top of the mount. And no man shall come up with thee..." (Exodus 34:2-3).

The life of prayer involves protracted periods of fellowship (Luke 10:39), "Mary...sat." The word "sat" teaches us to "take time to be holy, speak oft with our Lord, spend much time in secret with Jesus alone." People who come to see you do not sit unless they have time. Most of our praying is done while standing or on the run. We are even taught to pray while we do everything else. A life of prayer is not a spirit of prayer. Mary's sitting is in contrast with Martha's serving. The time

she could have spent in serving, she spent in sitting at His feet. Does not this sitting remind us of our position in Christ? Ephesians 2:6 “And hath raised us up together, and made us SIT TOGETHER in the heavenlies in Christ.” The Lord Jesus arose, ascended, and SAT at the right hand of the Father in majesty, and there “He ever liveth to make intercession...an high priest...made higher than the heavens” (Hebrews 7:25-26). And we as priests united with Him should appropriate our position in practical intercession. This does not mean that service is entirely neglected, but rather that prayer is considered more important. This conviction that prayer should be preeminent comes through messages, testimonies, experiences and inner constrainings, and it leads to the choice of a life of prayer. This choice is personal, “Mary hath chosen”; it is individual, and real. Though the Lord does not force any believer into this life any more than He compels His child to enter the life of consecration, yet the decision is just as definite for the former as for the latter.

There is a price to pay in every decision, in every choice to make, as we walk with the Lord. Every one of us has only 24 hours in a day. To choose to spend much time in prayer means that we must discontinue or at least cut down on some other things in order to redeem time for prayer. To do this, to put prayer in the most prominent place, it must be considered more important than newspapers, magazines, even Christian literature, hobbies, entertainments, fellowship, study and service. Though these things need not be forsaken, yet they must be held ready to sacrifice for prayer in part or the whole as the Lord leads. Some Christians spend far more time with dogs, cats, canaries, goldfish and love-birds than with the Lover of their soul. They spend more time with the creature than with the Creator, yet they wonder why they do not know Him better, why they lack power to overcome sin, why they are not more fruitful.

In my reading and searching for the Lord during the early years of my Christian life, I was challenged to a life of prayer when I found out the time given to prayer by men of God greatly used of Him. John Wesley spent two hours a day in prayer. Martin Luther spent three hours a day. R. M. McCheyne spent three hours a day. Sam Rutherford spent three hours a day. John Knox spent six hours a day. John Welch spent 8-10 hours a day. David Brainerd spent days in prayer. Praying Hyde spent days and nights in prayer. These men made the decision for a life of prayer. O that some of you might.

### **A Life of Prayer Criticized**

“But Martha was cumbered about much serving, and came to him, and said, ‘Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to

serve alone? Bid her therefore that she help me,” (Luke 10:40). Note that it was her sister who criticized her- “my sister” -and although she was a sister in the flesh, she represents those who are sisters and brothers by His blood and the new birth. Yes, it is usually a brother in Christ, or a sister in the Lord who will criticize the one who chooses a life of prayer, or a life preeminently spent at the feet of Jesus. Criticism will come from one, as Martha, over-active, hard-working, cumbered or burdened with many things and usually too busy to pray. Some such believers do wish others to do their praying for them, yet not to take time from helping them in order to do it. Carnal Christians whose efforts are mostly in the flesh cannot understand why those who walk in the Spirit wish to pray about everything; and become impatient and critical of those who delay a decision for service in order to pray about it, or who decide not to take part in order to pray, especially when there is an apparent need.

As we mentioned before, there is a price to pay in this decision as in all other decisions of spiritual importance. There will be a battle to maintain the decision, and each time there is a conflict between active service and prayer service, strong temptations will present themselves to defer prayer. There will be misunderstandings as a result of the conviction that prayer should come first. There will be sacrifices to make in order to clear room for prayer, not sacrifices of evil things, but good things, not of trivial activities but seemingly necessary ones. As Martin Luther once declared, “I am so busy I cannot afford to spend less than two hours in prayer.” Some of the criticism will be, that you are selfish, doing what you want to do rather than what someone else needs you to do; that you are lazy, taking the easy way out, and increasing the burden upon others; that you are not dependable because you will not drop everything to take active part when asked; that you are unfriendly, aloof, preferring to be alone than with others. Of course we shall do well to examine all such criticisms and make sure that no truth abides therein; then shall our prayer ministry be blessed and fruitful, and our decisions vindicated. You can see how such a choice must be based upon God’s Word and a conviction from the Holy Spirit, for faint hearts will never continue. I have seen a number of ministers and missionaries and lay people make decisions under my ministry to begin a life of prayer with seemingly genuine convictions and interest; but they soon dropped away.

A missionary in India had been working in her district many years without real fruit. Someone handed her the life of Praying Hyde to read. She at once saw the cause of her barrenness, and decided to make prayer primary instead of secondary. At any cost she wanted to know Him and this prayer life. She decided for a life of prayer to give the best hours of her time to prayer including the hearing of His Word. Most of the first year was a battle to remain true to her covenant with the Lord.

Accustomed to an active life of steady work all day long, temptation was keen when she heard others going about in hard Work while she was seemingly inactive in her room. The Lord gave grace and kept her. Soon every part of the work prospered. Whereas only 100 believers could be counted after many years of hard labor, two years after she entered this life of prayer there were 600. The cause of spiritual fruitlessness is not prayerlessness, but “prayerlittleness.”

### **A Life Of Prayer Commended**

“And Jesus answered and said unto her, ‘Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things but one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her’” (Luke 10:41-42). O, if I could impress upon you those five most vital words from the lips of our Lord - “BUT ONE THING IS NEEDFUL”. No, I did not say it. The Lord Jesus said it. He who knows all things, who knows the value of all things, who knows the comparative value of one against another, who perfectly evaluates the spiritual foremost; He said that prayer is the one needful thing. The “many things” of Martha were not considered needful by our Lord when compared to Mary’s “one thing”. We know that the Word itself in other places teaches that it is necessary to preach the Gospel, teach the Word, do personal work, give, and other things, but because believers for the most part will choose to do these things, or choose with Martha to serve, rather than with Mary to sit at His feet, therefore prayer becomes the one thing neglected, so the one thing needful. Many will preach, teach, witness, distribute tracts, write, sing, play, lead services, organize, give, but not - the one thing that is needful - pray. How wonderful to turn to the scriptural response to the Lord’s “one thing is needful”, written by David in the Spirit (Psalm 27:4), “One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life TO BEHOLD the beauty of the Lord; and TO ENQUIRE in His temple.” Some years ago I was holding a campaign in a large church in Canada. The pastor told us we would be living in the home of his most spiritual member. After we were there some days we believed his judgment was true. The meetings did not awaken much response, so I decided to spend a day in prayer and fasting alone. I have never met a Christian so upset as that dear member. She tried every way to get me to eat, and to urge Mrs. Stelling to take me a tray or slip some sandwiches in the door. Like Martha, she was conscientious, sincere, and well-meaning. Protracted prayer was absolutely foreign, even disturbing, to her. Brethren, “one thing is needful.”

### **“That Good Part”**

The Lord not only commended the life of prayer, by saying that it was the one thing needful, but He called it “that good part.” Mary’s sitting rather than Martha’s serving was called the good part. The choice of a life of prayer is good for the chooser; the increased companionship with Christ, the increased knowledge of Christ, the increased enlightenment in His Word and of His will, and the resultant experiences are good. And it is good for the saints; the whole cause of Christ is benefited, the particular field in which the chooser dwells, and the individual saints for whom he prays. It is good even for the sinner; for the added hours of intercession, the added grace in the believer’s walk, and the added power in his testimony, will all together make the gospel more convincing.

### **“Which Shall Not be Taken Away From Her”**

The Lord concludes His commendation with a promise to the chooser, that no one shall be able to take away the fellowship in prayer, for HE shall not take it away from her. Martha’s plea was in vain, “bid her therefore that she help me.” And of course Mary would have to leave His feet to help Martha. This shows that there will be attempts to take away the life of prayer from the chooser, but the Lord who calls, encourages, and sustains in the life of prayer, promises to protect the period. Behold His rebuke to Judas on another occasion. “Let her alone.” I can abundantly testify that He has done the same for me as I have claimed His promise. In view of this challenge to prayer read the first verse in the next chapter. As you think of this one thing that is needful, remember that ONE person does not take up all the room at Jesus’ feet, nor one thousand, nor one million, nor one billion, for the earth is His footstool.

## **Prayers in Genesis**

### **Bethel, the Place of Prayer**

The first prayer warrior of the Bible is Abraham. The first direct reference to prayer in the Bible is related to Abraham; also the first use of the word “prayer”; also the first recorded prayer, and the first recorded intercession. Abraham was a great man of prayer, and in this connection it is significant that he is the one to whom God made great promises, opening the dispensation of promise. For no one shall ever prevail before the Lord in prayer who is not well acquainted with the promises of God. Study God’s Word, know His promises, make them the

basis of your praying, and then your prayers will be effective, with confidence and assurance.

The first direct reference to prayer in the Bible is in Genesis 12:8, "And he removed from thence unto a mountain on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, having Bethel on the west, and Hai on the east: and there he builded an altar unto the Lord and called upon the name of the Lord," Now there is in the King James version a seemingly similar reference previous to this in Genesis 4:26. However a better translation renders it "called by the name of the Lord." Abram did not build the first altar by any means, but his altar was the first altar of prayer. Others before him were pre-eminently for sacrifice, but his for prayer. This is brought out in a further reference to the altar in Genesis 13:4 "Unto the place of the altar which he had made there at the first: and there Abram called on the name of the Lord." Therefore "Bethel" has become almost a synonym of "prayer." In every reference in Genesis to Bethel, it is set forth as a place where God and man were in communion. Visions were given, covenants confirmed and promises made there. It is called in Genesis 35 "The place where God spake with" Jacob; and in Hosea 12 a place where Jacob spoke with Him. It is a place in which God took delight, even affixing His name to it (Genesis 31:13 ). And as truly, God delights to meet us in a place of prayer, today. He has visions to impress upon our hearts; He has covenants into which He would draw us, and form with us, and seal to us; He has promises which He wishes to bring to our attention, and apply to our lives for personal blessings. Oh, let us set up a Bethel and forsake it not, but make it a delight to both Him and ourselves.

Later references in the Old Testament to Bethel show that it came into disrepute, that God sent His prophets to prophesy against it, and that it was condemned. All of this was because the God of Abram and the God of Jacob was no longer worshipped as the God at Bethel. Kings, priests, and people were going through the form of worship but there was no communion between God and man. Surely when the place of prayer ceases to be a place where God the Father and His child fellowship one with another, where God talks to man and man to God, then the Lord ceases to take delight in that place and prayer becomes a vain form. I trust that you will never be satisfied to let prayer become a mechanical process or a rote form, where other gods have been substituted for God the Father and His Son our Lord Jesus Christ.

What the Scripture does not say or omits, often throws much light on what it does say. Now note that Abram left Bethel and went down into Egypt. In Egypt he was in trouble, for it was the forbidden land. There is no record of Abram's building any altars in Egypt, or of his calling upon the name of the Lord. So it is that when the believer forsakes

the place of prayer, he will surely slip from the Lord and into the world. And just as sure as he disobeys and seeks the things of this world, he will feel no inclination to pray. The Christian in the world is not interested in building an altar nor in seeking the face of the Lord. It was not until Abram “went up out of Egypt” that he returned to Bethel and the altar “he had made there at the first:” and again “called on the name of the Lord.” My Christian friend if you have forsaken the place of prayer, if you have become entangled in the world, oh, that you might separate yourself from it all and return to the fellowship and communion with your Lord and Saviour, that sweet relationship that you knew at the first.

### Separation and Communion

It is significant to note that after each major decision of separation that Abram made he built an altar of prayer. In Genesis 12:1-3 Abram was called to leave kindred and country. After he had done this “he builded an altar unto the Lord, and called upon the name of the Lord” (Genesis 12:8). After his separation from Egypt (Genesis 13:1), he again came before an altar and “there Abram called on the name of the Lord” (Genesis 13:4). After separation from Lot whom he loved (Genesis 13:14), he moved to “Hebron, and built there an altar unto the Lord” (Genesis 13:18). Finally, when he had sent Hagar away with Ishmael, to be separated from this son in the flesh (Genesis 21:14), again it is written, “And Abraham planted a grove in Beer-sheba, and called there on the name of the Lord” (Genesis 21:33). So Abram after each separation seemed to have a renewed vision and spirit of prayer. After each surrender he seems to be led into a deeper communion with the Lord.

Do not these things teach us that separation is not only “from,” but also “unto”? Each separation from persons and things we love, is to lead us unto One who loves us. Though we are called to leave *many* we hold dear, yet are we led unto the love of only ONE. Increasingly true shall we find that it is His purpose to wean us unto Himself, as it is written “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with *all* thy heart, and with *all* thy soul, and with *all* thy mind” (Matthew 22:37). Why should we fear to be separated from this world, when we shall be drawn into the love of Him who created it? He, “of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named,” desires that we love Him above our own little family. Does He not deserve it? And is He not worth it? If only we knew the fellowship with Him that awaits us, gladly we would yield those things upon which we have set our hearts, and that divide our love to Him.

Oh, child of God, when He calls you to surrender your love of the dearest to you, and subordinate it to your love for Him, though the



step may be “very grievous” (as it was in Abram’s sight--Genesis 21:11), yet only obey and yield, that you “may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height” of the love of Christ. He wishes to lead us into His love, into the reality and warmth of it, into the knowledge and possession of it. This He can only do as we are willing to be separated from the love of other persons and things. He will lead us into this love for Himself and from Himself, as far as we are willing to be led.

Each new surrender we make, is of someone or something, a little nearer to our hearts, but each time we are led a little nearer to His heart. Abram left his home and country, but held to his family. He held a little longer to Lot. He held still longer to Ishmael. Yet with his separations we find a growth of faith in the Lord, and a deepening of fellowship with the Lord. Let us be sure that love of home, wife, husband, children, mother, father, relatives, friends, pets, possessions, books, hobbies, sports, professions, even Christian service, and fellowship, be subordinated and yielded to our Lord and His Love. Let us submit our hearts to the searching of the Holy Spirit and the Word, and be ready to surrender or be separated from any He shall reveal as hindering a closer communion with Him.

A true believer does not dread nor despise the final separation. Rather does he look for the day when he shall leave all earthly things, and longs for the hour when he shall enter into the eternal, uninterrupted communion with the Lord Jesus Christ. If the same principle of separation operates now and will bring us like benefits here on earth, why should we so fear to surrender to our glorious Lord? Rather let us count all things as dung for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord, and the closest walk with Him.

### **The First Recorded Prayer**

The first recorded prayer in the Bible is found, according to my belief, in Genesis 15:2-3. We are told previous to this that men built altars and made sacrifices to God, and that they called on His name, but no prayer is recorded. And as you know, the first appearance of any doctrine, instruction, etc., in the Bible, deserves special study and recognition.

It is mentioned in three separate places heretofore that Abram built an altar unto the Lord, and called upon the name of the Lord. So we know that Abram quickly learned to pray, and early sensed the value of prayer. But not until we reach this well-known chapter do we have before us one of his prayers. From this first prayer we learn several very important lessons.

Here is set the precedent for that never-failing phrase, “give me.” It is the first phrase in the first prayer. No wonder it is so easy to say and so hard to refrain our “give me’s.” Are we not being taught that the primary lesson to learn in prayer is that God is the Giver and man the receiver? And didn’t Jehovah encourage as well as provoke this prayer from Abram by challenging him with “I am thy exceeding great reward”? Yes, He is teaching that man is utterly dependent upon God, his shield and reward, his defense and offense, his protection and strength, his covering and provision. We remember Jesus, in the New Testament prayer pattern, teaching us to say, “give us.” It is true that prayer should not be entirely or pre-eminently personal requesting, but He still holds out to us with open hand more than we have dared to ask for.

Again, we note that Abram was not asking for material blessings, but for spiritual gifts. In Genesis 13:2 we read that Abram “was *very rich* in cattle, in silver and in gold.” He gave Lot the choice of the land, caring not for material gain. Then he refused “the goods” offered him by the king of Sodom in return for his help in defeating the bandit kings. Yet Abram prayed “What wilt THOU give me...,” as though he had nothing. Yea, through Romans 4, Galatians 3, and Hebrews 11, we find that Abram was seeking spiritual blessings through God’s promises when he prayed. How much of our praying is for spiritual blessings rather than temporal? We pray readily for healing, physical protection, goods, clothing, shelter, money to meet bills, jobs, development of talents, both for ourselves and others; but how many of us covet rather, spiritual gifts, the fruit of the Spirit, the outgrowth of faith, wisdom in heavenly things, growth in grace, spiritual service, salvation of souls, and above all, the knowledge of Christ?

Then see how Abram reasoned with the Lord. He was old, he had no child, his faithful steward servant would receive his inheritance, the family name would cease, and the promises could not be fulfilled. His reasoning was good and true and was based on the facts as he had them. His doubts were honest, and he was not rebuked. The Lord simply raised his eyes from the steward to the stars, and taught him to look from the possibility to the promise. So let us bring our doubts and misunderstandings, and reason with Him. He will clarify and edify.

In this first recorded prayer in the Bible, which was prayed by Abram, and written in Genesis 15:2-3. The Lord had just confirmed to His servant that He was his “shield” and “exceeding great reward.” Wherefore Abram remembered the Lord’s first call and great promise of reward to him, and since he had fulfilled the conditions to receive the reward, he wondered why the Lord’s Word had not come to pass. He reasoned with the Lord explaining his great darkness.

First notice that when circumstances are going contrary to the promises of God, we may reason with Him who made the promises. This is our privilege in communion with Him. "Come now, let us reason together, saith the Lord--." And it is far better to come to Him now or when the doubts and questions are forming in our hearts, than to wait until they have festered, and bitterness ensues. "Produce your cause, saith the Lord, bring forth your strong reasons--." So Abram reasoned, "Lord, Thou hast promised to make of me a great nation, but how can a nation be formed, when not even a child has been born? Thou hast promised to make my name great, yet it shall only go to the grave, for I have no son. Thou hast promised through my seed to bless all families of the earth. Behold my steward, and he a Syrian outside the royal line, has given birth to a son in my home, and one born in my home shall be my heir. Therefore all things shall go to him and that which Thou didst promise to perpetuate shall perish." Abram was an old man and no doubt had pondered much about these things. Oh that the Lord would teach us to reason with Him as this prophet did of old. Surely then our fellowship in prayer would be sweeter and richer. How humble he was in spirit too. Although he was separated from country, kindred, father's house, and was in the land which the Lord showed to him, yet he made no mention to the Lord in his argument of how he had fulfilled the conditions set forth in His promise. Are things going contrary to the promises you are claiming, then why not "tell it to Jesus alone"? But be sure that you have obeyed the conditions. Tell Him the very things that the flesh has been suggesting as accusations against His faithfulness and truthfulness. Though they be "strong reasons," yet present them in all humility and boldness.

Again we learn that it is legitimate to seek for confirmation of promises when circumstances are opposed to their completion, and they seemingly are made void. The Lord did not rebuke Abram but assured him that his fears were unwarranted, for another's son would not be his heir, but his own son according to the promise. After Abram had presented his reasons for doubting that the promises of God would be realized as He had said, then the Lord took him out and showed him the stars, saying, "So shall thy seed be." Thus we may expect God to confirm His promises to us, but not with a change of circumstances. If we take to Him in prayer our doubts and the reasons, He will deepen our convictions on the Word given us and reaffirm to our hearts the inner assurance of faith without sight. It is His desire to provoke in us trust in His Word, regardless of how, when and with what He shall bring it to pass, but simply because He said it. He is honored when we stand on His promises unshaken by the *sight* of seeming failure and contradiction. It is said of Abram that he "against hope, believed in hope." It is one thing to believe

in God's promise when everything points to fulfillment. It is another thing to believe when circumstances are neutral pointing neither one way nor the other. It is still another thing to believe in His Word when circumstances are all opposed to the execution, but this last is "giving glory to God." May God give us through prayer, this triumphant faith that is well-pleasing to Him.

## **The Second Recorded Prayer**

Abram's second recorded prayer and the second inscribed in the Bible is found in Genesis 15:8. This prayer, even as his first request, was prompted by a revelation, a promise, a challenge from the Lord. In the first verse He spoke, "--I am... thy exceeding great reward." In prayer Abram accepted the challenge, "Lord God, what wilt Thou give me--?" In verse seven He spoke again, "I am the Lord that bought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give thee this land to inherit it." Immediately Abram responded in prayer, "Lord God, whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?" This teaches us the most vital lesson in prayer, that reading the Word should precede prayer. We should let God speak to us before we speak to Him. Jehovah first spoke to Adam. We should let Him reveal Himself, and what He is to us, "I am thy--"; we should let Him make real and personal His promises to us, and challenge us and warm our hearts, before we pray. Then shall we be provoked to fervent, believing petitions and supplications. We should open the Book before we open the mouth.

Moreover, our deepest and most effective prayers will be provoked by the Word of God. No prayer life can develop to maturity that is not based upon the Word. Prayers will become lifeless repetitions of well-worn phrases, and general in their petitions unless continually based upon new Scriptures and old. How well-dressed are prayers clothed in Scriptural phraseology, how soul-stirring, how appealing, how comforting, how faith-provoking. Therefore our praying should be related to our reading. So often the Scripture is read only as a matter of form, the Book is closed, and our minds are closed to the Book, we praying in the same old way, forgetting completely the Scripture read. The Scripture should be read to help us pray, not only in spirit but also by becoming an actual part of our prayer. Promises should be quoted and set before the Lord. George Mueller suggests that after a brief prayer for light and guidance, we should commence our devotions with the Bible, and not with prayer. W. H. Griffith Thomas calls God's Word "the fuel of our prayer."

Now the heart of Abram's prayer reveals a desire to be sure of God's will. The consecrated Christian has an intense passion to know

and be sure of the will of God for each step, yea each decision in his life; and prayer becomes the vital instrument in obtaining that knowledge and assurance. He who is little in prayer is little in consecration; for there are a multitude of things not clearly or directly revealed in the Bible, about which we should know the will of God, and we can only find it through the avenue of prayer. Our Lord is eager to reveal His will to us and takes extreme delight in those of His children who seek to know what pleases Him. When we commune with Him in this way He calls us friends, saying, "Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you." (John 15:15). Many is the time I have used this verse as a basis of intense petition to know His will, and thank God, light has come to dispel the darkness of uncertainty. Abram "was called the Friend of God" (James 2:23), "And the Lord said, 'Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do;'" (Genesis 18:17). Many Christians are so busy serving the Lord that they forfeit the delights of a friendship walk with Him. They ardently serve in obedience to the general revelation of God's will, but the preciousness of finding His specific and personal will revealed, is not known to them. Notice in verse thirteen the Lord said, "Know of a surety--," and through His own wonderful way confirmed His will to Abram so that he would never doubt. Let us be faithful and zealous in seeking His will, and be assured through prayer.

### **Praying in the Flesh**

It is too bad that Abram's first prayer after receiving his God-given name "Abraham," should be prayed in the flesh. I refer to Genesis 17:18, "O that Ishmael might live before thee." Abraham's prayer in this chapter typifies the theme of Galatians, for that which was begun in the Spirit, was concluded in the flesh.

Again we find Jehovah appearing unto Abram and revealing Himself to His servant with a challenge and a promise, declaring, "I am El Shaddai," or the "All-sufficient One," or "God Who is Enough," or "The Satisfier." And again we find the response of Abram to be the kind that pleases Him, "And Abram fell on his face: and God talked with him." Truly Abram began his prayer in the Spirit, for he manifested humility and submission. God honored this attitude and communed with him. Humbleness and reverence should always mark our approach to the Lord if we expect to have fellowship with Him. And notice that "God talked *with* him," not *to* him only. This is real prayer. We do not have a record of what Abram said, but no doubt it was in substance, thanksgiving, praise and worship.

Now we believe that this prayer of Abraham's, "O that Ishmael might live before thee," was in the flesh for several reasons:

1. HIS PRAYER WAS NOT ANSWERED. Jehovah had just revealed that he should have another son who would be the heir. In Chapter 15 He had revealed the son would be "out of thine own bowels." Here He revealed "And I will--give thee a son--of her." This is what caused Abraham to laugh the laugh of unbelief, and pray that God would accept Ishmael as the appointed heir and promised seed. He was definitely thinking of God's prophecy about Sarah and the promised son when he interceded for Ishmael. It is true that Jehovah said, "I have heard thee." However, He also said "*but*, my covenant will I establish with Isaac--." Yes, God heard but answered with limitations. He gave Ishmael the second blessing, no doubt a type of those who today seek a "second blessing" without the full realization of the value of the "first."

2. HIS LACK OF SUBMISSION TO THE WILL OF GOD. Though his body might still have been in submission "on his face," yet his heart was in rebellion, "Oh that Ishmael might be the one." Abraham did not conclude his prayer as he should have, "Nevertheless, not my will but thine, be done." This is the world's mistaken idea of prayer, that we should coax and plead until we convince God to do what we want, and convince Him to make our way His way. In spite of God's revealed will, he persisted in his own desire and scheme. This is not importunate praying in the true sense, it is the sin of stubbornness and rebellion. May you discern the difference in your own prayers and take heed.

3. HIS LACK OF PROPER RESPONSE TO GOD'S GLORIOUS PROMISES. He was so concerned about his child "after the flesh," his son of "bondage," that he could not rejoice in such marvelous promises as we read in this chapter that God made to him. How often we lose the enjoyment of what God is offering us, simply because we are trying to offer Him a substitute of our own; how often we fail to see His revelation to us, because we insist on showing Him our self-made plan. No doubt he thought that if God accepted Ishmael, his own blunder would be overlooked, and his mistake turn out to be wise. But God would not set His approval on Abraham's carnal deed. Rather, by announcing Isaac's birth, He gently and severely rebuked Abraham.

4. HIS REQUEST BROUGHT HIS COMMUNION TO A CLOSE. "And he left off talking with him, and God went up from Abraham." Who knows what Jehovah might have yet revealed to Abraham, had he confessed his act in the flesh, rejoiced in the grace of God that still provided Isaac, and submissively accepted God's second-to-the-best for Ishmael? But no, He saw Abraham's persistent hope for his son of error, and "God went up--." May the Lord Jesus Christ deliver us from praying in the flesh.

## Benefits of Communion

Abraham now illustrates to us the privilege and profit that can be ours in communion with the Lord our God. What a contrast between Abraham “the friend of God” (Isaiah 41:8 and James 2:23), and Lot the friend of Sodom. In Genesis 18:1 we read of Abraham, “And the Lord appeared unto him in the plains of Mamre: and he sat in the tent door-.” But in Genesis 19: 1, “And there came two angels to Sodom; and Lot sat in the gate of Sodom.” The Lord came to Abraham but stood afar off from Lot. Not even the two angels went to visit Lot, rather did they come “to Sodom,” and that on a mission of judgment. He “whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God” (James 4:4); and the believer who backslides into friendship with the world, as Lot did, loses his privilege of fellowship with the Lord. Now on the contrary, having fellowship with the Lord is a proof that we have found favor in His sight. For Abraham said, “My Lord, if now I have found favor in thy sight--,” and then sought and was granted the privilege of communion. Beloved, if you are enjoying a consciousness of the Lord’s presence in your prayer life, if you are hearing Him talk to you as well as granting your requests, then rest assured that you have found favor in His sight and that your walk is pleasing to Him.

Another important lesson to learn in holding converse with the Lord is that we must first show a desire for fellowship and even earnestly seek Him before He will come near and manifest Himself to us. Although “the Lord appeared unto--” Abraham, it is written that He only “stood by him” (evidently a short distance away). And then after Abraham “ran to meet” Him, and “bowed” before Him, and besought Him “pass not away, I pray thee, from thy servant,” the Lord came toward the tent, and under a tree refreshed Himself and talked with Abraham. How often do people wait for the Spirit to move them before they will pray, and wait and wait and wait? How many have I heard say, “I didn’t pray because I was not in the spirit. I was not in the mood”? Beloved, the Spirit who moved holy men of old to write, says, “Draw nigh to God and he will draw nigh to you.” (James 4:8). This is all the Spirit-moving we should need in order to pray. The Word of God teaches us to make the first approach.

Again in Genesis 18:9-15 we learn that the Lord reveals His will concerning the one with whom He has the holy fellowship. The Lord assured Abraham of His interest in his wife, and spoke to him of His purpose with regard to both her and him. He reaffirmed His promise to His friend, and strengthened his faith saying, “Is anything too hard for the Lord?” Says Alexander MacLaren, “In regard to one’s own history, it is still more evidently true that the one way to apprehend God’s purposes in it is to keep in close friendship with Him.” The one who walks with the

Lord as a friend not only is taught to understand the trying experiences through which he has passed, but also is shown the way he should take when the dark clouds arise on the horizon. The Lord who advises us not to be unwise, but understanding what His will is, confides in the one who walks by His side or sits at His feet. Child of God, if you would understand the way of the Lord with you, and the will of the Lord concerning your loved ones who are under your care and responsibility, then keep in constant communion with your heavenly Father, for He will “instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go--.”

Finally, in communion with His children, the Revealer of Secrets makes known to them something of His purposes with regards to others, as He did to Abraham in Genesis 18:16-22. Thus saith the Lord, “Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do?” then the Lord proceeded to reveal to His friend His purposes in connection with Sodom. Yes, “The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him; and He will shew them His covenant” (Psalm 25:14). Especially through His Word and personal enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, the Lord makes known His purposes to His children who fellowship with Him. The devoted Christian can peculiarly enter into the wisdom of God concerning nations, cities, churches, organizations, families, and individuals. Says C. H. M., “The more closely we walk with God, and the more subject we are to His Word, the more we shall know of His mind about everything. I do not need to study the newspaper in order to know what is going to happen in the world; God’s Word reveals all I want to know.” May, therefore, Abraham’s example inspire us to commune oft with the Friend of Friends.

### **Communion Precedes Intercession**

We have been studying Abraham’s prayer life in Genesis 18, and in verses 1-21 have noticed his intimacy in prayer as a friend of God. Now in verses 22-33 we have revealed to us his intercession as a friend of others. To one who would enter into the secret chamber of intercession, there are several important things revealed here that must not be passed by quickly. So let us stay awhile.

We learn from this record that intercession is considered as communion with God, for it is not until we read through Abraham’s prayer for the city of Sodom, and come to the last verse, that we are told “the Lord left communing with Abraham.” All intercession to prevail, should be preceded by communion, and communion that does not end with intercession is incomplete. No matter how urgent our prayer requests and burdens are, we should never feel that it is a waste of time to enter into His presence with thanksgiving, or praise, or adoration, or



worship. Dr. Chapman tells of a time when he was in prayer with Praying Hyde, and how for ten minutes the only words spoken were, "Oh, God;" "...and then when he knew that he was talking to God--then came up from the depth of his heart such petitions for men as I have never heard before." Often perseverance in His presence is necessary before effective intercession, and this is suggested in verse 22, "but Abraham stood yet before the Lord." We must be near, yea, very close to the Lord to prevail for others. It is interesting to note Abraham's progress in communion before his fervent intercession: in verse 2, "bowed himself;" in verse 8 "stood by;" in verse 22 "stood before;" and in verse 23 "drew near and said." This reminds us of a child who has something special to ask from daddy. First she plays at his feet, then she sits on his knee, then she rests in his lap. But not until she has cuddled up real close and has her little face near to his, does she say, "Daddy, may I have--?" Oh, Child of God, draw near to the Father in heaven and plead earnestly, for such is the need of this world, "their sin is very grievous," and we have a place "near to the heart of God."

We also learn here that a revelation of His judgment should precede forceful intercession. God revealed to Abraham the great cry and the grievous sin of Sodom, and also that He was come to judge the same. This thing which God was about to do moved Abraham to pray for the wicked city. The cry of supplication is needed to remedy the cry of sin, but it takes a strong consciousness of the wrath of God to stir us to pray. Let us read and believe the Word of God concerning God's judgment upon sin, and let us pray that the Holy Spirit will make it real to us, until the burden drives us to prayer. In Exodus 32:10 the Lord said, "let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them;..." Then Moses besought the Lord. In I Chronicles 21:16 "David...saw the angel of the Lord...having a drawn sword. Then David and the elders...fell upon their faces" and interceded. Paul says in Romans 1:18 "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men." This revelation we have in the Bible, and we believers know it is true, therefore it should be a spur in one of our sides even as love is in the other, urging us to prayer with travail. Abraham believed that the Lord was both Destroyer and Deliverer, hence his intercession (verse 23). God uses those who are "apart from" to pray for those who are "a part of" this world of sin.

Finally there should be a love in the heart of the intercessor for those for whom he intercedes, that constrains him thus to pray. There is no doubt in my mind that Abraham was praying for Lot and his family as he cried unto the Lord for Sodom. In Genesis 19:29 we read, "When God destroyed the cities of the plain,...God remembered Abraham and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow." Abraham was interceding

for Sodom because of “righteous Lot” even as God was listening for Sodom because of the righteous Lot. We know the love Abraham had for his nephew Lot by his reluctance to separate from him, by his submission to him in time of strife, and by his deliverance of him from the three Kings. Now instead of accusing him of worldliness, he intercedes for him as “righteous.” How many of us would say “Serves him right,” instead of pleading to save his righteousness? We must have a love and compassion that moves us to agonize instead of accuse, and drives us to intercede in spite of their sins. So we see that these three lead us into a fervent intercession: a right relationship for self; a right revelation from God; and a right regard for others.

### **Lessons in Intercession**

Now we shall conclude our deliberations on Genesis 18 concerning Abraham’s communion with the Lord by pointing out a few helpful thoughts taken from his intercessory prayer. C. I. Scofield considers Abraham a type of “the spiritual believer,” because he “‘came and dwelt in the plain of Mamre (fatness), which is in Hebron’ (Communion).” And truly we have seen and enjoyed some of the spiritual fatness resulting from Abraham’s life of communion with his and our Lord. May we each choose as wisely as he.

As we read this pleading prayer, we are so taken up with the earnestness of it, the boldness of it, and the naturalness with which it follows the revelation of God’s purpose against Sodom, that we fail to note that Abraham is not praying for himself nor his wife. With an unselfish heart he uses his present opportunity with the Lord, for others. How true it is that many believers fail to pray until they have a desperate need, a trying experience or a perplexing problem; then the whole burden of their prayer is naturally for self. But the true intercessor, who by his constant communion with the Lord is able to trust the Lord with all his own needs and problems, is enabled thus to bear the burdens of others and give his undivided interest for them. Mark Jesus, the perfect Intercessor, who having complete victory over the world, flesh, sin and the devil, now “ever liveth to make intercession for them.”

There is another omission. Abraham intercedes before there is any evidence of repentance. There is none in the city, not even in Lot’s household. Brethren, let us not be of those who only pray for the ones who desire or deserve our prayers, who are helpless and realize it, who have sinned and are sorrowful; but let us also intercede for the undeserving, the hardened, the bitter, the deceived, the lustful, the lost; for such were we. What an encouragement this should be to us who pray for missions on foreign fields. It proves that we can have a burden for others

even before they receive the message themselves, and before we know the depth of their grievous sin (Abraham thought there would be at least ten righteous there. There was much sin because of little salt, and that had lost most of its savor.). How Abraham developed trust when he prayed. He began with “fifty” and made six requests until he reached “ten.” Moreover he started asking with differences of five (50-45-40), and ended by increasing the difference to ten (30-20-10). Someone said, “The more God gives, the more does the suppliant expect and crave-.” Every answer encourages to more asking, more faith in asking, more boldness in asking. Jesus expressed this truth by the use of three words in a prayer promise, “ask-seek-knock.” Oh, believer in Christ, pray much, ask much. He who encouraged Abraham of old, will encourage you.

In Genesis 18:27 we find the expression, “which am but dust and ashes.” With all his boldness, Abraham exhibited deep humility and reverence. Those who dwell in His presence know and confess their own frailty; and while praying, the lower they descend in self-life, the higher they ascend in Christ-life. You will find that the strongest prayers of intercession will break forth often after the deepest confessions of unworthiness. Fear not to let the Holy Spirit search your heart and lead you into confessions and crucifixions, for then will you be best prepared to stand before the throne and call down a blessing upon others. Dust: the lowest form of earth manifest to the eye, the lowest form to which the dead goes, that which not only soils but is soil itself; and Ashes: that which is burnt out, unprofitable, undesirable, cast away. Thus did Abraham humble himself in his intercession and take the place that was to be accorded Sodom, “dust and ashes.”

Then Abraham said, “I will speak but this once;” he spoke, “And the Lord went His way.” In other words Abraham put the limitation upon himself. As in the other requests if he had not added “but this once,” the way would have remained open for further intercession. The Lord did not hinder nor stop His praying friend: He constantly encouraged him. Abraham ceased. Only His coming will reveal how many prayers were unanswered because we limited the grace of God and ceased to persevere. But perhaps Abraham thought “ten” was a safe margin. What do you think?

### **Continued Intercession**

In Genesis 19:27-28, we once more see Abraham, the prayer warrior, but this time as a more-than-conqueror standing on the field of battle near the side of his Chief-of-Staff. What a contrast here between Lot and Abraham. The same morning that Lot was hastening from the place where he sat before the lords on earth, Abraham was hastening “to

the place where he stood before the Lord” of the earth. Truly our position before the Lord is permanent and free from judgment, but our position before men is temporary and open to judgment. And behold what privileges are accorded the believer in communion with his Lord, that are withheld from the backslidden Christian. Lot, under guard of angels and under threat of recompense (verse 26), was warned not to look upon the burning cities; while Abraham had the liberty of being alone with the Lord and beholding the whole scene.

Observe the faith of Abraham in prayer. Once before he had been told of Lot’s danger, and immediately he summoned his servants, armed them, and pursued the enemy until Lot was delivered. This time, although he knew Lot was in greater danger, he who formerly had hastened to his rescue, only looked on, stood in the place of prayer, and trusted better hands to deliver. He “looked toward Sodom—all the land of the plain—and beheld—the smoke of the country—as the smoke of a furnace,” and yet, it is intimated, he was calm, undisturbed, and patient. Even though he had no definite assurance that the Lord would spare Lot, yet he had made his request known unto the Lord, and surely, “the peace of God, which passeth all understanding,” was keeping his heart and mind. Beloved in Christ, you too may have this peace concerning your loved ones in danger, even in danger of judgment from heaven, if only you will hasten “to the place” where you may stand “before the Lord.” For it is written “Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee, because he trusteth in Thee.” (Isaiah 26:3).

Then too, notice the faithfulness of Abraham in prayer. Although he had been before the Lord and interceded fervently, yet he “got up early in the morning to the place” of prayer and “he looked toward Sodom,” even till the very day of judgment. It is not enough to ask once, we are to watch in prayer until the answer comes. Away with this foolish teaching that faith needs only ask once, and that to ask repeatedly is evidence of lack of faith. To ask only once is in most cases an evidence rather of spiritual laziness. Abraham stood in prayer as long as Sodom stood in the plain. Paul said, “continue in prayer and watch in the same with thanksgiving.” (Colosians 4:2). Thus we are to pray, constantly “looking toward” the thing for which we pray, watching for every little evidence of answer, and thanking God. And as we behold the Lord’s hand at work, we can pray intelligently, adjusting our prayer request to the evidence of His revealed will. Abraham stood in that place as a reminder of his original request and the Lord’s promise. Nor was his motive in vain, for we read in verse 29 “that God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the overthrow, when He overthrew the cities in which Lot dwelt.” We know that the Lord our God cannot forget, yet He hath said, “Put me in remembrance: let us plead together” (Isaiah 43:26).

Finally, we see that as Abraham stood by the Lord while Sodom burned, so in the Day of Judgment when sinners shall be punished, the children of God shall be safe at His side. And as Abraham “looked” on, submissive and satisfied with the judgment of God upon those for whom he had interceded in Sodom, we too shall be content and acquiesce to the will of the righteous Judge when we behold the ungodly, even some for whom we have prayed, going into everlasting torment of the lake of fire. But brethren, let us rise “up early” and stay up late, that we may through faithful, trusting intercession, rescue some as “brands from the burning.”

### **A Prophet's Prayer**

Inasmuch as the last reference to Abraham's prayer life, found in Genesis 21:33, has already been referred to in a previous message, this will be our final study of prayer in connection with the patriarch. The basis for our present meditation is the two references to prayer, Genesis 20:7 and 20:17.

In this chapter we find the first record of the word “pray” in the Bible (referring to prayer). Although prayers have been offered up, and even recorded before this, still the actual word has not been mentioned. Other words such as “commune,” “call upon,” and “talk with,” have been used. The word “pray” occurs, but not in a parenthetical sense. It is interesting too that the first to use the word is the Lord (Genesis 20:7), and that, in a sense almost amounting to a command, “He shall pray”. Some claim that there are no commands in the Bible to pray, but unless a difference is being made between “command” and “exhort”, such a statement could hardly be supported by Scripture. Prayer properly used must be provoked by a revelation of a personal God, and the privilege extended by Him on His own conditions.

It is also significant that the first use of the word “prophet” is in this same verse “for he is a prophet, and he shall pray for thee.” Here the Lord has clearly and marvelously defined the prophet as being primarily a man of prayer. He is designated as a man whom God has ordained to pray for others, to be an intercessor. Oh, how far our “prophets” of today have departed from the privilege and practice of prayer. May our Lord who thus ordained it, once more revive the spirit of prayer and fully infuse every minister of the Gospel. Abimelech was a king among men, but Abraham was a prince with God. God did not exhort the heathen king to pray to Him, but to go to Abraham and have him pray. The Lord would not hear from this man although He recognized “the integrity of his heart” and “the innocence of his hands” in this matter; yet He would hear from His servant Abraham, although he was

guilty. Praise God for the standing we have before Him when by faith we become children of God. Not that Abraham's evil was condoned, for rather was he rebuked with the heathen king's mouth, but that God will hearken to the prayer of the weak, inconsistent Christian, rather than an upright, proud, sinner. Oh, the grace of God that will use us, imperfect as we are, because we are accepted in the Beloved, and covered by His own righteousness.

Yes, the Lord said, "he shall pray for thee, and thou shalt live." Oh, Christian, know you not how much depends upon your prayer for the unsaved? Know you not that your intercession for the sinner concerns life and death, hell and heaven? Pray, pray, pray. Beseech the Lord for the Abimelechs in your family and neighborhood, yea, even though you be a stranger as Abraham was to this king. If "God causes you to wander" into a contact with some unsaved person, let your heart immediately be lent to the Lord for prayer that he might live.

"So Abraham prayed unto God: and God healed Abimelech, and his wife, and his maid servants." No doubt that after both Abraham and Sarah were rebuked, they repented and broke the secret and inconsistent covenant they had made with each other. The evidence is that God heard their prayer and healed the king and his household. Friends in Christ, let us too, be cleansed of all evil ways, let us put away all sin, that we may be used of the Lord in our God-given-through-Christ privilege of praying for the "dead" to be healed and live.

### **A Backslider's Prayer**

Now that we have completed our meditations on Abraham's prayer life, we must drop back to a prayer recorded from the lips of Lot, his nephew, which we purposely passed by so as not to break the trend of thought about Abraham. Turn now to Genesis 19:18-20, and read Lot's prayer.

The first part of Lot's prayer reveals that he did have some faith, even though it was covered over with much of the rubbish of this world. Nor is this more than we should expect, for the Scripture has reasons for calling him "righteous" (II Peter 2:8). And every Christian no matter how worldly or backslidden, should bear some marks of his relationship to God. "My Lord," shows that Lot did have a personal faith, even though, "not so, my Lord" is a perfect illustration of Jesus' rebuke to the disciples, "And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" (Luke 6:46). If we would only stop and think, how inconsistent some of our prayers would sound to us! He also refers to himself as "thy servant;" and he gives glory to God by acknowledging that sparing his life was "grace" and "thy mercy," "shewed unto me," when as yet he was

not out of the actual danger zone (see verse 17). For this reason, no doubt, his prayer was answered, “and he said unto him, ‘See, I have accepted thee concerning this thing also, that I will not overthrow this city, for the which thou hast spoken.’” Says A. MacLaren, “God answered the cry, whatever its fault, and that may well make us pause in our condemnation. He hears even a very imperfect petition, and can see the tiniest germ of faith buried under thick clouds of doubt and fear.”

And notice his fear, as revealed in the next portion of his prayer, “I cannot escape to the mountain, lest some evil take me, and I die.” The angel had just given divine guidance for his safety and advised him to flee to the mountain lest he die. What a pitiful spectacle is the backslider in the time of trouble. What a hopeless, weak, assembly of contradictions is his effort to pray. He who had been living by the principles and customs of the world, could not in this hour of extremity, recognize divine guidance. It seemed unreasonable to him. Promises from God meant nothing to him, for Sodom had not taught him how to appropriate. There was no need there. Because he had not learned to trust Him in the midst of the multitude of men “in the city,” he now feared to be alone with Him, “in the mountain.” Though he recognized that the Lord had saved his life from a lust-thirsty mob, and then had saved him again from a city under divine wrath and fire-judgment, yet he could not trust Him in a less dangerous place, “the mountain.” What a contrast with Abraham who had so lived in fellowship with the Lord, that he could fearlessly stand by His side (verses 27, 28).

Finally, the request or petition in his prayer, manifests the folly of Lot’s reasoning. The angel had plainly pronounced destruction to “all the plain,” and that included Zoar (verse 22). But Lot thought because it was “little” there would be little danger; and because it was “near,” he could reach it sooner than the mountain; and because it was “a city” he could reach it more easily than the mountain. Oh, the folly of man’s reasoning in the face of God’s revelation. This worldling’s heart, long divided from the Lord and His Word, found it difficult even in this fearful hour to part altogether from the earthy, “Is it not a little one?” And though his request was granted, and he went to Zoar, he was only there a short time and then had to leave. What he would not do through faith in God’s Word, he finally had to do through fear (verse 30). Oh, believer, if you are holding on to even a little of this world, may Lot’s experience move you to leave it all and escape to the mountain, Christ Jesus. Move up to higher ground. Pray not for the preservation of earthly and worldly contacts.

## Prayer for a Wife

In chapter 24 of Genesis we have a remarkable record of a servant's prayer and immediate answer. This unnamed but faithful servant (Eliezer), reveals at once the powerful influence of another's prayer life. "O Lord God of my master Abraham, I pray thee" (verse 12). Surely he had learned from his praying master, the importance, naturalness, and power in prayer. The Lord had said of Abraham when in communion with him, "For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord--" (Genesis 18:19). How truly this servant learned "the way of the Lord" in prayer, from his master. O Christian housewife, may your servant be thus influenced by your prayer life! O Christian employer, may your employees be affected in the same manner by your praying! O Christian pastor or teacher, may the sheep of your flock bear the marks of your prayer life in theirs!

And we learn another important lesson from this praying servant, that is so much needed today, and that is, that those who have intentions of marriage should pray for the Lord's guidance as to the right partner. No doubt his master who believed "The Lord God of heaven...shall send His angel before thee" (verse 7), was praying; and his son, who was accustomed to meditation and prayer (verse 63), was praying; as well as the servant that the Lord would lead him to "the woman whom the Lord had appointed out for my master's son" (verse 44). Of course this would seem like robotism to the unsaved, and even foolish to the carnal believer, but "the right way" (verse 48) to the yielded believer who is walking "in the way" (verse 27). The Lord's way is always the right way, and His choice blessed, satisfying, and impossible to improve. How many heartaches would be avoided, how many broken homes spared, and how many orphanages and reformatories made unnecessary, if only young men and young women would pray for His choice and accept whomsoever He appointed. The normal result when He chooses is "she became his wife; and he loved her." I have thanked God for many years that He led me to trust in His decision. Mothers, fathers, and guardians should thus intercede too, for those given into their responsibility, as they approach the age for this vital decision.

Again we learn from this chapter, that in the earnest desire to know and do the will of God, we may rightfully pray for assurance through a token, even suggesting the way the Lord shall reveal it. "And it shall come to pass, that the damsel to whom I shall say, Let down thy pitcher, I pray thee, that I may drink; and she shall say, 'Drink and I will give thy camels drink also;' let the same be she that thou hast appointed... and thereby shall I know" (verse 14). Such a request must be breathed to no one but the Lord, the token is between Him and you, "I had done



speaking in mine heart” (verse 45). Such a prayer requires faith not only to expect an answer as prayed, but also to accept it as from the Lord when revealed, Be sure too that you are “in the way.”

And still another lesson is taught us, concerning our testimony of answered prayer. After he had prayed and God answered, he then openly testified to these strangers, as to where he had prayed (verse 42), what he had prayed (verses 43-44 ), and how God had answered (verses 45-46). I know that many times Christians when speaking to strangers, or unsaved people, are asked how a certain matter came to pass (which was an answer to prayer), fail to give the testimony. We are afraid they might not understand. Some claim it would be casting pearls before swine; but giving a testimony is never “casting pearls before swine.” If you read the context of Matthew 7:1-6 carefully you will find it refers to a believer criticizing another believer before an unbeliever. Unless our conversation be seasoned with salt, how shall the unsaved become thirsty for the living water?

Finally let us note that he was just as alert to praise as to pray. Hardly had he finished praying (“before I had done”-verse 45) when the Lord revealed the answer. And hardly had the Lord answered when “I bowed my head, and worshipped the Lord, and blessed the Lord--” (verse 48). And again, “When Abraham’s servant heard their words, he worshipped the Lord--” (verse 52). As a pastor once said, “what we win by prayer, we must wear with praise.” Nor was he ashamed to bow his head in the open by the well before all, or in the home of his stranger-host before the family, and thank God. This was a further testimony to God’s glory.

### **Prayer for Children**

“And Isaac entreated the Lord for his wife, because she was barren...” (Genesis 23:21). We read in verse 20 that Isaac married at the age of 40, and in verse 26 that he was 60 years old when Rebekah bare her firstborn. Therefore he had been waiting 20 years for the Lord to give children to him. He had waited twice as long as his father Abraham (see Genesis 12:4 & 16:16). When Abraham saw his wife was barren, and thought upon the promise of God concerning his “seed,” he went in unto Hagar and Ishmael was born. But when his son Isaac saw that his wife was barren too, he went in to the Lord and entreated him for his wife. The Lord honored Isaac’s prayer and his wife conceived. Although the death of Abraham is recorded before the birth of the twins, yet actually he lived fifteen years after their birth. So no doubt Abraham who remembered with sorrow his mistakes with Hagar, and with joy the miracle birth of Isaac, greatly influenced his son by counsel, to entreat the Lord, rather

than to invent a method in the flesh to obtain the promised seed. Abraham knew too through his experience in Gerar with Abimelech, that it was the Lord who “fast closed up all the wombs;” and that it was through prayer that God healed Abimelech’s “wife, and his maidservants; and they bare children.” (Genesis 20:17,18).

In Biblical times children were counted as a gift from God (Genesis 48:9; Joshua 24:3,4; Psalm 127:3), and to be barren was a shame and a reproach (I Samuel 1:5,6). Today it is almost considered a shame and a reproach to have children. They are counted as a curse instead of a blessing, a liability instead of a gift. Isaac prayed for children, but now the evils of birth control have strongly implanted themselves in the American home. The loose marriage vow, the easy divorce, the lust of free love, the love of money, the love of pleasure, and the working wife, have all contributed to breaking up the divinely instituted family, and to warping the minds of young couples concerning children. It is written, “I will therefore that the younger women marry, bear children, guide the house, give none occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully” (I Timothy 1:14). The only birth control Christians should practice is by prayer, trusting in the governing of the Holy Spirit, unless of course, there are physical complications.

This prayer also has spiritual applications. It is normal for every Christian to beget others, and every child of God should earnestly desire and expect to give birth to children, after their kind. Paul speaks of his “little children” of whom he travailed in birth (Galations 4:19). He speaks of himself as spiritual father of the Corinthians (I Corinthians 4:15). He tells of Onesimus whom he had “begotten” in his bonds (Philemon 10). And he calls Timothy “my beloved son” (I Corinthians 4:17). Yea, truly, we are all to be soul-winners; and not to have spiritual children is a reproach and a shame. “Must I go, and empty-handed? Must I meet my Saviour so? Not one soul with which to greet Him: Must I empty-handed go? O, ye saints, arouse, be earnest, Up and work while yet ’tis day; Ere the night of death o’ertake thee. Strive for souls while still you may.”

Now, if you have not been leading souls to Christ, if you have been waiting and witnessing, but not winning the lost, then take it to the Lord in earnest prayer. “Isaac entreated the Lord for his wife, because she was barren.” It is God who “giveth the increase”, even as it is He who giveth the physical babe. Jesus spoke of “the children whom God hath given me” (Hebrews 2:13). Therefore beseech Him in prayer for such spiritual gifts. Paul writes that we should “desire spiritual gifts” and “covet earnestly the best gifts.” (I Corinthians 14:1 & 12:31). Surely if we entreat Him for this He will hear us as He heard Isaac. Isaac had the promise of an earthly seed and this enabled him to pray with confidence. We have the promise of spiritual seed, yet we must with faith pray for it.

Let us beware too, lest we fall into the error of Abraham who was influenced by Sarah to use fleshly means to gain the promise. Some Christian ministers have already sensed the shame of barrenness, but instead of using the God-given means of intercession, have invented devices and methods to bring about decisions. Such resultant spiritual Ishmaels are a curse to the true church and a constant reproach to the true soul-winner. They do not and cannot remain in the fellowship, and they stir up continual strife, "mocking". Our knees play a vital part in the birth of souls. May the Holy Spirit through His Word and work again send the Bride of Christ to her knees to entreat Him concerning her barren condition. And oh, may the Lord be entreated.

### **Recognizing a Special Call to Prayer**

We have one more reference to Isaac's prayer life in Genesis 26:25. This we shall consider before leaving Abraham's son, although the reference is slight. May it please Him who takes the "things which are not to bring to nought the things that are:", to use this text for our instruction. We read, "And he builded an altar there, and called upon the name of the Lord."

In verse 24 we are told that "the same night" that Isaac arrived at Beer-sheba, the Lord appeared unto him. He had appeared unto him in Gerar, but only to confirm the covenant of his father to him, warning him not to go to Egypt, and promising to bless him if he remained in the land. Here in Beer-sheba He appeared unto him to reveal Himself to Isaac, saying, "I am the God of Abraham;...I am with thee..." It was "there" that Isaac built his altar and worshipped and prayed. When and where God reveals His presence to us is a good time and a good place to go aside and pray. There are times when at a Bible Conference or even in a regular church service, a certain message moves and stirs your heart. You feel like you'd like to go aside and pray. And so you should if it be at all possible. Many who have been moved by some challenging message from the word of God, and who have felt especially drawn close to the Lord, instead of getting alone for a period of prayer, have become busy in work, or fellowship, or something else, and soon the stirring has left and no definite decisions have been made. The Scripture says, "Draw nigh unto God, and He will draw nigh unto you"; and the converse is certainly as important and true, if God draws nigh to us, we should draw nigh to Him. Maybe at your radio, maybe while reading the Bible or a spiritual book, yea, whenever you may be, or whatever you might be doing, if you should sense His presence, try to get alone with the Lord and pray. Commune with Him, let Him speak to you, and speak thou with Him.

There have been times when I have suddenly and unexpectedly felt the presence of the Lord upon me. Immediately I have sought a place nearby to pray and let Him speak that I might know what He wished. I have made important decisions at such times that proved to be the leading of the Lord, and some of these times my wife has been with me in prayer. Once when we were on the mission field of Kentucky, I was seated in our home cracking nuts for some fudge. I was meditating about the Lord and His blessings upon us when I felt peculiarly warmed within and tears came to my eyes. I dropped everything and went into another room to pray. I asked the Lord if He wished to speak to me; if this stirring was from Him, that He would make clear to me what I should know. He spoke. Then I called my wife and asked her to pray with me. The Lord's Spirit came upon us both and we were bathed with His presence. When we arose from our knees, we decided to leave the mission and go to school for further training in music; and eventually we were led into the work of evangelism.

When Saul was on the road to Damascus, the Lord Jesus Christ appeared unto him, and the presence of the Lord of glory shined about him above the brightness of the sun. It was then and there that Saul fell to the ground and cried, "Who art thou, Lord?" and "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" The Lord according to Acts 9:5 revealed Himself to Saul; and according to Acts 9:6 revealed to him that he should arise and go to the city, where he would receive further instruction; and according to Acts 26:16, the Lord Jesus also revealed unto him there on the road what his ministry should be, and commissioned him to go to the Gentiles with the Gospel message.

Therefore let us be alert to discern the presence of the Lord; let us be quick to respond to His voice; let us diligently seek His will when He reveals Himself to us; and let us reap the fullest benefits of His manifest presence, at such a time.

### **The First Record of Prayer by a Woman**

We now turn to consider the first reference in scripture to prayer by a woman. This is recorded in Genesis 25:22, "And the children struggled together within her; and she said, If it be so, why am I thus? And she went to *enquire* of the Lord." Although the actual prayer is not given, and the question, "Why am I thus?" is asked (of Isaac no doubt) before she enquired of the Lord, yet we feel justified in believing that this is the question she also asked of the Lord. The answer in the 23rd verse would confirm this. Now the Scripture says (I Corinthians 14:35), "And if they will learn anything, let them ask their husbands at home;" but as in the case of Rebekah, sometimes the husbands cannot answer

the questions of their wives, so it is good for the wife to know how “to enquire of the Lord.” She will find that the divine Husband has all the answers; the Greater-than-Solomon will tell her “all her questions” for there is “nothing hid from Him that He cannot answer” (II Chronicles 9:1,2). Matthew Henry points out that some read verse 21, “And Isaac entreated the Lord *with* his wife”; and it is very important that wives pray with their husbands (woe to the husband who cannot or will not pray with his wife I Peter 3:7). But it is also vital that wives know how to call upon the Lord alone. No doubt her praying with Isaac encouraged her and instructed her to pray by herself also. And note, the chief concern of women in prayer should be for the family, their children, husband, home; the child’s birth and rebirth.

What a blessing it is for us all to be able to unburden our hearts to the Lord, and to enquire from Him as to His ways with us. The Word of God and prayer are the two means by which we can enquire today. Do you have a burden on your heart? Are you troubled concerning some personal or family problem? Then avail yourself of the privilege that every Christian has, and take it to the Lord in prayer. How blessed, especially for mothers as Rebekah, to be able to go to the Lord concerning their children, whether unborn or born. The Lord knows the fears and doubts and anxieties that often flood a mother’s heart, and He knows how to relieve that heart. It isn’t so much the pain and suffering as it is the uncertainties involved in the problem, that cause the “Whys?”. Beloved mothers and wives in Christ, “Be anxious for nothing: but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:6,7).

There is also a spiritual application to this passage. Notice the clauses, “and Rebekah his wife conceived. And the children *struggled together within her*.” The moment a soul is born again, there is a new nature created within that begins a conflict with the old nature. This struggle in the breast and life of new Christians always brings confusion, doubt and fears. Oh, that they would follow the example of Rebekah and enquire of the Lord. He would lead through His Word and Spirit and bring peace and understanding. How many, when they do not understand and are sorely troubled about this, instead of enquiring of the Lord through His Word and prayer, are led by men into traps of Satan, such as experiences of “Tongues”, and “Baptisms”, and “Visions”, and “Holinesses”, and what not.

The Lord answered Rebekah and so explained to her the cause of her internal strife, that her “Why am I thus?” was fully satisfied, and she was no longer troubled. He told her three things: (1) “Two manner

of people' were in her womb." Jacob and Esau were entirely different and contrary. So in the believer there is a holy nature and an unholy nature, a corrupt nature and a Christ-in nature, which co-exist and "struggle together within". In Romans 7:15-25 it is explained as the "would and do not," or "would not and do" conflict. In Galatians 5:17 it is called the conflict of the "flesh against the Spirit." (2) "One shall be stronger... and younger." Jacob was second born and stronger than Esau. So in the child of God, the new nature is younger being by the second birth (John 3:3,5), and is stronger than the old, being after the image of Christ (Colossians 3:10 and I John 4:4). (3) "The elder shall serve the younger." Esau yielded to Jacob the victor. So in the Christian the old man shall yield to the "new man" (Romans 6). Thank God we have this fact (Ephesians 4:22-24; Colossians 3:9-10) and the accompanying exhortations to crucify the one and be clothed with the other, or to destroy the one and be dressed in the other. Therefore, meditate on these things and pray, that your peace and profiting may appear unto all.

### **Praying Before Planning**

As we study prayer and prayers in the Bible it is also instructive to note prayerlessness in the Bible. As there is great power in prayer to bless, so there is great power in prayerlessness to curse. We need to hold to the one and flee from the other. As Dr. A. C. Gaebelein says, "In thousands of Christian lives the disaster of prayerlessness has happened. There is no Christian who does not deplore the many mistakes made, the many offences given, the many backslidings and sins, and who is not ready to confess the source of all has been lack of prayer. How much sorrow, heartache, trial and burden can be avoided by more prayer, by asking counsel of the Lord." Jacob's prayerlessness can not be unnoticed. In all his years until his return to the land of his kindred, there is not a single mention of prayer. And though the Lord blessed him in spite of his prayerlessness, yet the material gains were not without unnecessary hardship, sacrifice and strife, plus leanness of soul.

In chapter 32 we find Jacob on the way back to the promised and forsaken land. He has heard of Esau's anger continuing to burn in an active approach toward him. Fear gripped his heart, and as with us all, despair led to prayer. And here we have Jacob's first recorded prayer, from verse 9 through 12. The prayer in itself is faultless and a fine pattern to follow as well as a fine spirit to emulate. The trouble is with the position of his prayer. He planned first, then prayed, which is always the wrong order. And although he did not ask God to bless his plans, yet after he prayed he continued to form those plans and execute them. Thus he showed where his trust was. How often do our actions after our

prayers reveal the little faith we have with our prayers. Jacob had always been a prayerless planner and plotter, and *seemed* to be able to match his wits with the best, though often having to resort to deception. So we must give him credit for learning this much, that he should pray. However, as C. H. M. says, “We can never get to the end of our plans until we have been brought to the end of ourselves.” And Jacob had not been brought to that place yet. According to chapter 33 verses 5, 8 and 9, Jacob’s plans and presents seemed to have had no part at all in his deliverance or the change in Esau’s spirit. The Lord seemed to have made this inward change in Esau in answer to prayer, after Peniel, where He made an inward change in Jacob.

In this prayer Jacob both began and closed claiming God’s promises: “O God,-the Lord which saidst” (verse 9); “and thou saidst” (verse 12). And he, in both cases, quoted the promises of the Lord. Dearly beloved, how very, very important it is to *know, quote, claim, and correctly apply the Word of God* in our prayers. This was a general promise made, but Jacob applied it to a specific case, and God honored it. He made God’s promise of prosperity and propagation a basis for protection for himself and family (verse 11). Observe further in verse 10 that he revealed a humble spirit, acknowledging his own unworthiness (as far as he had realized it), and also acknowledging the Lord’s goodness in increasing his wealth from a staff to his present possessions. He did not accuse God of taking away things for which he had spent long years of labor, nor did he become bitter in the face of the probable loss of all, even his own life. He started with nothing, the Lord gave and the Lord kept; he could only pray He would continue to keep by delivering from the present foe. This humble spirit prepared Jacob to receive the richest experience of his life with the Lord that same night. As Matthew Henry says, “Those are best prepared for the greatest mercies that see themselves unworthy of the least.”

### **An All-Night Prayer Meeting That Prevailed.**

We now come to study the greatest experience in Jacob’s life as a servant of God, his Peniel night of prayer. That it was all night is shown from Genesis 32:22, “And he rose up that night”; and verse 31, “And as he passed over Penuel the sun rose upon him”; and finally verse 24, “and... wrestled... until the breaking of day.” That it was a period of prayer is shown from Hosea 12:4, “Yea, he had power over the angel, and prevailed; he wept, and made *supplication* unto him:”. The scene began with the angel wrestling with Jacob, but closed with Israel wrestling with the angel. Could such expressions as “Let me go” and “I will not let thee go” be used except both be wrestling and taking a very ac-

tive part? Some most able commentators refer the whole experience to God's dealing with Jacob and reject the idea of his being in prayer. I'm afraid that such an interpretation would bring us only a part of the truth and partial instruction. The angel wrestled, for he "prevailed not against him"; and Jacob wrestled, for the angel said, "thou... hast prevailed." Again it is written plainly in verse 24, "then wrestled a man with him," or the angel with Jacob; and in verse 25, "Jacob's thigh was out of joint, as he wrestled with him," or Jacob with the angel. Plainly, it was as all wrestling bouts are, provided by two contestants. Here they were the angel and Jacob, the angel being the Lord (verses 28,30).

**CONTENDING**-It is no doubt that self, the great enemy of our Christian lives, is also the great thief in our prayer lives. Yet it is through prayer that we shall overcome self. Jacob was Jacob's great enemy, more than Esau. After he had prayed, he planned to send presents to Esau, to appease him. He sent the presents, then later in the night, not satisfied, he sent his loved ones over the ford of the Jabbok, "And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him" (verse 24). Although the "Spirit lusteth against the flesh" continually in all our experiences of life, yet it is when alone with the Lord in prayer that He can most effectually deal with self. Here He can reveal the utter helplessness and corruption of our self, and the power and grace of Himself. Every one of us must sooner or later learn of this contention the Lord has with his self-life, and find the victory, if he would have power with God in prayer and power with men in preaching.

**CONQUERING**-The Lord's purpose in conquering our self-life, is for our sakes. As some one said, "He only desired to overcome that He might bless." Self was a hindrance to Jacob's usefulness and also to God's desired blessing upon him. Even his otherwise flawless prayer was ineffective because of self, as pointed out in verses 9-12. This victory will be wrought in us by the Lord, but only at the decision of our own wills. "When he saw that he prevailed not against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh; and... the thigh was out of joint." thus we see the Lord who could prevail over his body by a touch, could not or would not prevail over his will by wrestling. But often He does touch our bodies, to turn our wills, and trounce our self-lives. The thigh sinew is a part of the strongest portion of the body, and thus the Lord showed Jacob that his strength in its might was weak and unprevailing. Beloved let us go to our most Friendly Foe and ask Him to teach us this costly but invaluable lesson, our treacherously deceiving weakness, and His most treasured but invisible strength.

**CLINGING**- "And he said, 'Let me go'". Oh, the grace of God that subdues us and then puts that strength at our disposal. It was after He had thrown Jacob's thigh out of joint (verse 25) and caused his sinew



to shrink (verse 32), that He was held immovable by Jacob, Yea, when we are weak, then we are strong. As one of God's saints has said, "When we are vanquished, we are victors". "Let me go," challenged Jacob; it revealed that His staying or going was dependent upon Jacob's decision. Jacob leaped to the challenge of his faith. "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me," Notice the progressive losses of Jacob: 1. His present to Esau (verse 21). 2. His two wives, two womanservants, and eleven sons (verse 22). 3. All that he had (verse 23). 4. Then Jacob was left alone (verse 24); and he was broken and lost his strength and power (verse 25). 5. Now only the Lord was left and He said, "Let me go." No wonder Jacob clung for dear life and cried "I will not let *thee* go." Blessed is the one who counts all things loss for Christ, that he "might know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings."

**CONFESSING**-Jacob though seemingly holding the angel who had prevailed, under his power, yet was confessing his Contestant's greatness when he said, "except thou bless me." For we read in Hebrews 7:7, "And without all contradiction the less is *blessed of the greater*," Then to the question "What is thy name?" he answered, "Jacob," which means "upplanter," or "deceiver," or "cheater." So he had truly come to the end of self before the Lord in admitting his own weakness and impurity. And again he showed self was overcome when he called the place "Peniel," not because he prevailed, or was called Israel, or made a prince, or even because he became lame, but because "I have seen God face to face," and He let him live.

**CROWNING**-"And He blessed him there." After the conflict the crown. Oh, the grace of God, that He should win the conflict, and we should wear the crown. Truly we are *more than conquerors*, through Him. "Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel"; a new name indicating a new person, one with self overcome by the Lord Himself. "As a prince"; Esau was a prince with men, Israel a prince with God. "Hast thou power with God and men, and hast prevailed." What a crown, to have power with God in supplication; and power with men, in service. Yea, unless we learn to prevail with God, all efforts to prevail with men shall be in vain, no matter how great our natural talents and zeal and wisdom. Prayer, and earnest prayer, and importunate prayer, and self-crucified prayer is God's way for us to prevail with men for His name's sake. Lord, teach us early.

## Abiding in Prayer

As I have mentioned before, Bethel speaks to us of a place of prayer; it symbolizes communion of the servant with His Lord. When Jacob was away from Bethel, usually God spoke *to* him (Genesis 31:3 & 35:1), but Bethel was “the place where God spake *with* him.” (35:13-15).

The Lord gave Jacob the land at Bethel, “the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it” (28:13); and He promised to be with Jacob when he left Bethel, but “will bring thee again to this land” (28:15). He longed for Jacob to return to Bethel and told him so (31:13). However, Jacob tarried along the way. Therefore He chastened him. His daughter was defiled, and his sons became guilty of deceit, murder, pillaging and kidnapping. Then God spoke directly, for Jacob did not seem to understand the handwriting on the wall. “Go up to Bethel, and dwell there; and make there an altar.” Jacob had made an altar at Shechem and called it “El-elohe-Israel,” or “God, the God of Israel,” in memorial of his new name given him at Peniel. However God did not recognize the altar, for it was out of place. At Bethel He recognized the name, saying, “Thy name is Jacob... Israel shall be thy name” (35:10).

All of this speaks to us of the Lord’s desire for us to have an abiding life of prayer. Though we might branch out and take trips from Bethel, it should be our permanent dwelling place. How many believers start out with a fine prayer fellowship with the Lord, and show signs of great promise and fruitfulness, but soon they have forsaken Bethel. In their quest for a wife, or a husband, in their increased family responsibilities, in their building of a home and business (33:17), they neglect prayer, always intending later on to return, as Jacob to Bethel, but losing many years that could have been fruitful. Then comes the chastening of the Lord, affliction, loss, and sorrow that could have been avoided. Oh, that we might take heed to the Word, “Go to Bethel, and dwell there.” Any work secular or otherwise that robs our prayer life, and hinders our communion with the Lord should be refused; and the same thing applies to any relationship with individuals, organizations, or programs. Note that even after the blessed account of Genesis 35:5-15, Jacob still did not remain at Bethel (verse 16), and he was involved in more and more trouble (35:19, 22; 37:34, 38), finally ending up in Egypt where he died. Jacob Called Bethel the “House of God,” but he never called it the “House of Jacob.” Abraham had made the same mistake. After establishing at Bethel (12:8), it is written, “and Abram journeyed *going on still*” *until he ended up in Egypt and in trouble (12:9, 10).*

Notice some of the reasons Jacob avoided Bethel: 1. It meant that he had to make a complete cut-off from Padan-aram (35:9), or a complete separation from the world. No one can maintain a communion and vital prayer life with the Lord, who lives on the border of the world.

That time spent in the world under the excuse of its being a relaxation, diversion, vacation, or hobby, should be spent in prayer and is robbing the individual of power and fruit. But alas, we have too many Jacobs who are contented to pitch their tents near Shalem, rather than dying a complete death to this world. 2. It meant he had to do some disciplining and judging. He knew there were things in his house that were out of order and to go to Bethel meant facing these things. The gods that Rachel had hidden and brought secretly with her (31:34) were now worshipped openly and by the whole household (35:2), for “a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump.” And the gods brought by the Shechemites (34:29) were being permitted by Jacob. Therefore Jacob who had promised at Bethel “then shall the Lord be my God” (28:21), had to commend his household “and all that were with him” to put away their strange gods. Though personally guiltless, he was responsible for the guilt of these under his authority. But how many avoid the place of prayer because they wish to avoid self-judgment and the examining light of the Holy Spirit. You cannot continue to worship gods and God at the same time. You cannot abide in prayer with unclean hearts or spotted garments. If you wish to have unbroken fellowship with Christ in prayer you’ll have to “be clean, and change your garments” (35:2). But if you are willing to hide “under the oak,” or in other words, bury the things that belong to the old life, God will cause your fear to come upon those you discipline (35:4), and His fear to come upon your unsaved neighbors (35:5), and He will appear unto you (verse 9), and bless you (verse 9), and call you by your new name (verse 10 with II Corinthians 6:17, 18) and make you fruitful (verse 11), as you commune with Him and He with you (verses 13-15). “Arise, go to Bethel, and dwell there.” May the Spirit of the Lord stir each of us to abide faithfully in the place of prayer.

### **Praying Before Journeying**

The closing reference to prayer in the Book of Genesis is also the last reference to prayer in the life of Jacob. Arthur W. Pink points out, “Beautiful, too, is it to note that here God met him for the seventh and last recorded time (see Genesis 28:13; 31:3; 32:1; 32:24; 35:1; 35:9).”

Jacob was living at Hebron where Abraham and Isaac had lived before him (35:27). Why he left Hebron and journeyed to Beersheba before calling upon the Lord concerning the journey may be explained:

- Because, it was a place where his grandfather had called upon the Lord (21:33), and his father also (26:23-25). “He chose that place, in remembrance of the communion which his father and grandfather had with God in that place--” (Matthew Henry).

- Because it was the border line between Canaan and Egypt; and brought to his remembrance the trouble into which Abraham had fallen when he crossed the border; and recalled to him the warning given to Isaac by the Lord, "Go not down into Egypt."
- Because, overjoyed at the news that his favorite son was still alive, Israel temporarily lapsed into the old Jacob and said, "It is enough: Joseph my son is yet alive: I will go and see him before I die" (45:28). But by the time he reached Beer-sheba he remembered his own past failures in planning and scheming before praying, and quickly repented, to call upon the Lord.

However it was, we see the importance of seeking the Lord's counsel, guidance and blessing before undertaking a long journey. Israel had an invitation from a king and prime minister; he was to see his son whom he loved but whom he had long given up as dead; and he had full provision for the journey; yet he realized he must for all this seek the will of God in the matter. "Shall I go up?" was the question on his heart that he must settle before he took another step. This he had learned through years of discipline at the hands of the Lord. The Lord first, not Jacob. "Nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt." How many of us seek the will of God before we take trips to visit loved ones, to accept invitations from friends, to accomplish business transactions, or to enjoy a vacation? No doubt some expensive and vain trips could be avoided as well as some doubtful ones made certain and profitable, if we did ask His will. But how many of us fail even to pray before we go, and ask His strength, protection and blessing, much less ask His will as to whether we should go? Surely our trips would be more peaceful, fruitful and enjoyable if we did. As A. C. Gaebelein says, "The last time prayer is mentioned in Genesis is in connection with the journey of Jacob to Egypt. In the beginning of the journey Jacob approached the Lord with sacrifices. He seemed to have been fearful about the long journey into the land of Egypt. The Lord quieted his fears."

Yes, the Lord did quiet his fears. He answered his prayer with definite assurances, "I am God...go down into Egypt...I will go with thee...I will also surely bring thee up again." What could be more comforting to a Christian about to take a long trip, encompassed about with uncertainties, fears, and responsibilities, than to have definite confirmation that he is in the will of God, has the Lord's presence with him, and will be returned again? This we can have through prayer. See the practice of Moses as he led Israel on her journeys (Numbers 10:35-36). Although the Lord does not speak to us as to the patriarchs in that day, yet He gives the same assurances to those who wait upon Him in prayer. He speaks to us *through His Word* the witness of the *Holy Spirit*, other

*people*, and through *circumstances*. Read Romans 1:9-10; 15:30-32; I Corinthians 4:19, 16:7, and II Corinthians 1:17, and you will readily see that Paul practiced seeking the will of God through prayer, and praying before taking trips, to guard his intense natural desire to visit the churches. See too, the confidence of Jacob after prayer, "And Jacob arose up from Beer-sheba... and came into Egypt," as though he had been waiting for one reason only, word from the Lord. When that came he acted, with a firm and positive step. Furthermore, a reading of the remaining chapters will reveal the prosperity and blessings that accompanied this trip of the one who "as a prince" had "power with God and with men, and prevailed."

## Miscellaneous Subjects on Prayer

### Sobriety and Prayer

World War II was the most far-reaching, the most involved, the most costly yet in American history or in world history. We expected to face unknown sacrifices and sufferings. Yet, in spite of these things, we should have an attitude of hope, and live a life of hope. The Scripture that has been put upon my heart is found in I Peter 4:7. In Weymouth's translation of this passage we read, "But the end of all things is at hand; therefore be soberminded and temperate, that you may give yourselves to prayer." What wonderful instruction for us in a period of national and world crisis!

You may say to yourself that this cry, "the end is at hand," is an old story and arises whenever something out of the ordinary comes to pass. But such a thought is the seed of mockery, and is the basis for Peter's warning in II Peter 3:3. Wherefore let us be careful not to fall into Satan's trap. One thing is sure: if the end was at hand in Peter's day, and we know the apostle wrote in Spirit and in Truth, then today the end is nineteen hundred years nearer. Therefore his exhortation is appropriate now, and we should heed the words written.

"Therefore be sober-minded." We as Christians need to be calm and sound in thought. Although the end is at hand, and although we are involved in it all, yet we are not to be alarmed. There will be false prophecies, there will be false reports, there will be propaganda. We must be sober-minded as we consider all these things, and careful as we form opinions concerning earthly as well as heavenly outcomes. We must be sober-minded in searching for God's will in our own lives, for new demands will be made upon us by organizations and governments.

Therefore be self-restrained, or “temperate.” This refers to our moral life especially. The physical well-being and strength of a people is greatly dependent upon their moral well-being. I am ashamed to say that at a time of such strain and stress as this, when physical strength is so vital, we are seeing the bars of morality lowered. People become carefree and careless, no doubt influenced by many within the armed forces who face death, and whose motto is “Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we may die.” We must not permit this attitude to grip us. If we believe the end of all things is at hand, then it is not a time to throw off restraint or allow passion, lust and the affections of the flesh to rule. On the contrary, we must walk circumspectly; as those who must give an account to Him who shall appear, and as those who do not wish to be ashamed at His coming.

Yes, be sober-minded, and self-restrained, “that you may give yourselves to prayer” (or for the sake of supplication). This day, when mission fields are closing and the Gospel ministry is being curtailed, presents a real challenge and opportunity for prayer. If our hands are to be tied, let them be tied together in intercession. God grant to the church today a spirit of covetousness for time in prayer. If prayer is going to be effective in moving nations, governments and organizations, as well as individuals, then we must pray, we must literally “give ourselves.” Such effective calling upon God is therefore dependent upon a soberminded consideration of God’s will, and a self-restrained walk in life.

### **Ministry of Intercession**

The ministry of intercession has never been more needed than today. The Church of Christ needs prayer, our nation needs prayer, the whole world needs prayer, and our Bible College needs intercession. Yes, we stand in need of much calling upon God, that we may walk worthy of Him under this present strain, and because of the prospect of future trial and sacrifice. But, at the same time, you and I have a most precious privilege as prayer stewards, for no branch of Christian work today enjoys as much liberty in service as the ministry of intercession.

This ministry of intercession is open to ALL Christians. We may be young or old, rich or poor, crippled or whole, deaf, dumb or blind, educated or untrained, with or without ability, yet the field of intercession is open to all of us. When a man can no longer pray, as David Brainerd in the last days of his life, he has already ceased all other service and is prepared to die. We may be without ability in a public ministry to lead, preach, sing, or even to give: yet, which one of us can excuse himself from intercession?

Again, all places and peoples are open to the ministry of intercession. Today because of war many nations are closed to the Gospel; and some nations in which the Gospel formerly enjoyed freedom, have now restricted its ministry. But all nations and tribes are still open to the intercessor, who can cross all borders and pass the strongest guards. There are some individuals we cannot reach with preaching, singing, visiting, or writing, because they will not give us audience; yet the long arm of prayer can reach, hold and follow these persons as long as it pleases to do so.

Furthermore, prayer opens the way for every other form of ministry. Fruitfulness in any public ministry of the Gospel is dependent upon prayer. This makes prayer PRIMARY. Moody claimed that no soul has ever been saved that has not been prayed for first. Charles M. Alexander said that every important thing that ever came into his life was brought by prayer. Ruth Paxson defines evangelism as "Power through personality, by prayer."

But there are a few requirements to be met by the intercessor. He must be faithful, for there is no one to drive him to prayer. The Gospel preacher, teacher, musician, or anyone who appears before the public, has a certain stimulus to move him to prayer preparation; but the intercessor is dependent upon faithfulness. He cannot even wait for special problems or burdens to inspire him to pray. Again, the intercessor must be humble, for there is no one to see him in the secret place except the "Father who seeth in secret," and consequently no one to commend or applaud his service; nor is there opportunity to see the fruit of his intercession upon an audience as he arises from his knees. Yes, I know the spirit is willing--but the flesh is weak. Then, there must be consecration of time. There is much that Satan can put in our way to keep us busy, so that the most important thing is neglected. Let us see that our time is in His Hands, and ask for His enabling, that we may have time to pray.

### **Our Union With the Intercessor**

No doubt we have all been reminded again and again of the need of faithfulness in the intercessor's life, or, in other words, the need of a regular, continuous prayer life, in order to pray effectively. Therefore let us consider the question "How may I gain this end?"

Perhaps you, as I, have found it difficult to pray every day for others. Sometimes there is no burden, and we do not feel like praying; at other times we put off the hour of prayer until the day is past. Again, we find ourselves at prayer-time so tired that we justify postponement until tomorrow, or fall asleep and give it up as a bad job. When intercession becomes a burden, we question our motives, fear legalism (being

bound by duty or ceremony), and the result is defeat. Yes, in fact, it is not only difficult but *impossible* for us as believers to ever be intercessors through our own efforts no matter how much we try; for “in me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not” (Romans 7:18). To believe this, is to take the first step in effectual, fruitful intercession.

The second is to see Jesus as the *Only* True Intercessor. If we for a moment believe we have intercessory qualities within us, that by trying hard we can work up a spirit of prayer, or by grim determination and the Lord’s help we can persevere before the throne of grace, the result is failure. As He is the only One crucified for sin, the only Resurrected One, and the One who can alone come again, so also does Christ Jesus our Lord stand unaccompanied as One who “ever liveth to make intercession.”

And the third, we must recognize our union with Him in the heavenlies. “Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) and hath raised us up together, and MADE US SIT TOGETHER IN THE HEAVENLIES IN CHRIST JESUS” (Ephesians 2:5-6). So as He sits, interceding without ceasing, we, conscious of our own defeat and the weakness of our flesh, must reckon on ourselves dead unto all self-intercessory possibilities, but in vital union with Him by faith, Then the Holy Spirit, who changes us into the image of the Lord from glory to glory, will form Christ more fully in us.

Let us therefore look to Him not only to supply all our intercessory qualities, but to be an intercessor, Himself, in us. Then shall we be able to include intercession among the “all things” that we can do “through Christ who strengtheneth” us.

### **Prayer Approach to the Word**

In a very short prayer found in Psalm 119:18, we discover the correct attitude with which a believer should approach the Word of God, Let us note:

“*OPEN THOU MINE EYES.*” We See the Psalmist coming to the Word as a blind man, one who is in the dark groping for light, one who is ignorant seeking understanding, as helpless and needing help. King David was educated, trained and cultured, but he leaned on none of these crutches. He came not as one seeing “men as trees,” needing only perfection of sight, but with both eyes completely closed, all self-efforts having failed. He was conscious that if the Lord did not open his eyes they would remain closed. “Open THOU.” Though we use our commentaries and books of explanation written by men of God who have proved themselves, *we must not forget* both to depend upon the Lord and



to give Him the glory. The Lord alone, through the Holy Spirit, is able to make real to us the spiritual understanding of His Word, “Then opened He their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures” (Luke 24:45). There is not much heart-warming unless the Lord is the source of our understanding. “Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us by the way, and while He opened to us the Scriptures?” (Luke 24:32).

*“THAT I MAY BEHOLD WONDROUS THINGS.”* The just must live by faith, pray by faith, study by faith. Here is a blind man expecting to BEHOLD wondrous things. He that cometh to God must believe that “He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him” (Hebrew 11:6). Do we approach God’s Word believing it is closed to the eyes of unbelief, and opened only through believing prayer? Then, and then only, will we see WONDROUS THINGS. “Call Unto Me,” saith the Lord, “and I will answer thee, and SHOW thee great and MIGHTY THINGS which thou knowest not” (Jeremiah 33:3). I remember once placing my eye to the telescope in the Washington Observatory. The naked eye could not see the many wondrous things that the telescope brought into view. Neither can we see with the natural eye the things of the Spirit.

Finally we read, “OUT OF THY LAW.” How meaningful are the prepositions in the Bible! Many of God’s children are now out of fellowship with Him and leading misdirected lives, because they have read something INTO rather than OUT OF God’s Word. The one who approaches the Word defiantly, with preconceived ideas, or with opinions formed from reading books, or with views and doctrines held by father, grandfather, pastor, and denomination because it was always so, will only seek to further establish or justify things *already* known. Such an one is reading INTO the Word. Only when we read OUT OF His Book can we get light, know that which was formerly unknown, and understand that which was heretofore not comprehended.

May this prayer be on our hearts and lips each time we come to His Word. May the *opening* of the Book remind us to pray “OPEN THOU MINE EYES THAT I MAY BEHOLD WONDROUS THINGS OUT OF THY LAW.”

### **A Prayer Promise**

Among the seven last prayer promises of Jesus as recorded in the Gospel of John, there is one that is very instructive and illuminating, namely, John 14:13 “And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.”

This promise presents a challenge in the clause, “And whatsoever ye shall ask...” Think of the Lord of Glory, the Almighty One, the All Possessing One, not only giving us such an opportunity, but actually putting our faith to the test by throwing out this glorious and searching promise, Yet, how beggarly are our requests in response to His open-handed “whatsoever.” To be more definite, if you were, as Solomon was, confronted face to face with the challenging statement of the Lord, “Ask what I shall give thee,” (I Kings 3:5) would you be so *bold* as to ask unwisely, or so *cautious* as to deny His power and might? Again, would you ask *more largely* of the Lord than *you are now* asking? This challenge is personal and present.

There is also a condition to be observed. This condition however is not for the purpose of limiting our asking, but on the contrary, to increase our faith, our vision, and our ability to ask and of course to receive. “In my name.” When anything was done or asked in Jesus’ name, it was in His place or as though He were doing it; in His position or as He would do it; and in His power which always accompanied the doing. Thus it was when Jesus said, “I come in my Father’s name;” and “the Holy Ghost whom the Father will send in my name.” And thus we should ask, as one carrying on His ministry, as one equally submissive to the Father’s will, and as one with faith that begets the same mighty answers.

What confidence through this promise the Saviour seeks to work in us, saying, “That will I do,” Here again as in salvation, we do the asking and believing; He does the work. Have you ever noticed the forceful evidence as to His deity presented by this verse? Jesus, while yet on earth as Son of Man is literally saying, “You ask *God* the Father *anything* you will, and not He, but I WILL DO WHAT YOU ASK GOD TO DO.” In Matthew 14, Herod the King promised with an oath to give Herodias’ daughter whatsoever she should ask. Although she asked a hard and grievous thing, yet to keep his word the king beheaded John. How much more confident should we be that our King of Kings can and will keep His Word and fulfill His promise to us.

Finally this verse shows us that the culmination of prayer, the whole purpose and high point is, “that the Father may be glorified in the Son.” That’s the reason for the unlimited possibilities in prayer, the association of Father-Son relationship with prayer, and the promise that the Son would bring the answer to pass without our help. Therefore, with this enlarged vision of the possibilities in prayer, let us ask in such a manner that only God could answer and thus glorify Himself in the sight of men.

## Faith Perfected For Prayer

It is written, "But without faith it is impossible to please Him; for he that cometh to God Must believe..." Faith is to prayer, what blood is to flesh. It makes alive, sustains, warms, and impels. In Romans 4:19-21, we have a picture of faith progressing, and it is most instructive.

Now when Abraham was first challenged by the Almighty's promise, he LOOKED AT THE POSSIBILITY of it's fulfillment. We read "he considered his own body...dead...and the deadness of Sarah's womb" (R.V.). There was nothing there to encourage his trust but everything to discourage, distress and depress. Certainly the case seemed hopeless. The Revised Version states, "without being weakened in faith, he considered" the circumstances. Though his faith was there, it was at its lowest point. It was not weakened, but on the other hand neither was it strengthened. It was holding its own, but not growing, nor perfected. Read Genesis 15-19, and you will note that Abram's going in unto Hagar, and his laughter at God's suggestion of Sarah conceiving, show the weakness of his faith. He was looking at THE POSSIBILITY of the promise becoming a fact.

But then we see an advance step in the next verse. Faith develops. "LOOKING UNTO THE PROMISE of God" (R.V.). How much depends upon the object of our look. Now Abram was considering that which did instill hope, and did provoke belief. Faith sees the promise but is blind to the circumstances. When Abram became blind (not just shutting his eyes now and then) to his old age and to the deadness of Sarah's womb, then his faith advanced, he "waxed strong through faith" (R.V.). Conditions are ever changing. Material things, temporal things, things that can be seen, are marked by change and decay; but the Word of God is sure, steadfast, and true, living and abiding forever. Therefore to look at the means with which the Lord has to bring His promise to pass, (as far as we can see), is to court weakness and be open to wavering. A changing goal is approached by a crooked path, and will never be reached. Strength, confidence and stability will come if our eyes stay on His fixed promises.

However, the final step to perfection, faith has not yet taken until we read verse 21. Here is the climax, the triumph of faith progressing, Abram now has LOOKED AT THE PROMISER. "He had promised, He was able also to perform." Now his faith was unbeatable, indomitable. A promise is wonderful, but vain if the promiser is unfaithful or unable to keep the promise. If our government were bankrupt, all the faith in the world would not cash a promissory note. Faith today between nations is being undermined because the promisers are unfaithful to their word. How blessed in such times to look off unto the only true and dependable One. Yes, the eyes of faith look from the possibility to

the promise, but must finally rest in the Promiser. Wherefore we read, Abram was “FULLY PERSUADED,” “ABSOLUTELY CERTAIN” (Wey), “FULLY ASSURED” (R.V.). Herein is faith completed and God is glorified. It is a credit to any man to have his word believed; truly Our God is honored when we say, “He has promised, He will do it.”

So, beloved, if your prayer be not answered, and your faith is wavering, gaze upon His promise, be blind to the circumstances, and delight yourself in the greatness, the omnipotence, and unfailing faithfulness of your Promiser, the Lord our God.

### **The Disciplined Prayer Life**

As each sinner has the privilege and responsibility of free choice, so has each Christian. The lot lies in the lap of every Christian to determine how far he shall go in the Lord and with the Lord. Therefore, a well disciplined life is vital to growth and usefulness. Oswald Chambers said, “My worth to God in public, is what I am in private.” It is usually true, that the difference between a powerless, fruitless Christian and a growing, fruitbearing Christian, is determined by his behavior, at home, in his spare time, or in his time when alone.

Jesus made it clear in Matthew 6 that it is not our manner of life in public and under constraint that is rewarded, but our actions before our Father who is in secret, saying: that we should give in secret (verse 4), pray in secret (verse 6), fast in secret (verse 18); and our Father who seeth in secret shall reward us openly. Our real self is not usually shown to the public unless we are caught off guard. But only in the proportion that our real self is surrendered to the Lord Jesus Christ will power be manifest to others. How do we behave, and how do we think, and how do we talk, and how do we use our time when not under the hand of responsibility?

Be sure that the Lord will test us and prove us. He that trieth the hearts of men will throw the reins upon our neck and see how we respond. With supervision removed, will we grow lax in service? With little or no service will we grow lax in Bible study and intercession? With no one to check upon us, will we faithfully examine ourselves? With no one more mature to challenge us, will we press on the upward way? If no one to fellowship with, will we be as devoted to the Lord? Many Christians have been moved from a circle of busy testimony to a circle of scarcely any activity. With an undisciplined life they have been slowly lowered into the standard of spiritual life about them, *praying only now and then*, Bible meditation is hit or miss, testimony silent. While those with a well ordered spiritual life can develop as well in a desert as in a denomination.

What is the safeguard against such a weak, barren life? And how can we discipline our spiritual life? Andrew Murray, commenting on Psalm 31:15 "My times are in thy hand," says, "The plural implies the singular, 'My time is in thy hand.'" Let us wholly yield each hour to His disposal, and watch and pray for His direction as to its use. Then again, we shall be helped if we remember "thy Father who seeth thee and heareth thee in secret." Yes, we are in His presence always, although we may not always be conscious of Him. Let us live as unto Him, let us *pray as unto Him*, let us study as unto Him, let us serve as unto Him. Then we shall be good stewards of our time, tongue, talents and titles.

### Prayer and Obedience

There is a little Word in the Gospel of John, chapter 15, which has captured my attention and challenged me to a more consecrated life, because of its relation to prayer. In the 14th verse we read, "Ye are my friends, if ye do WHATSOEVER I command you;" and in Verses 15 and 16, in part "...I have called you friends...that WHATSOEVER ye shall ask of the Father in my name, He may give it you." In other words the Lord Jesus is saying, "If you do WHATSOEVER I ask you, I'll do WHATSOEVER you ask me." What a challenge in prayer the Lord has here set before us. The limit and boundary of our asking and receiving are set only by our disobedience. Our Lord's desire is that we should have more and more liberty in asking, as well as more and more confidence in receiving, although at first reading, it seems that He is seeking to confine our praying by a strict requirement of perfect obedience.

Notice the testimony of the Scriptures concerning Moses: in Exodus 7:20 "And Moses did so as the Lord commanded..."; then in Exodus 8:12-13 "And Moses cried unto the Lord...and the Lord did according to the word of Moses." In the New Testament, we have the testimony of Jesus: in John 8:29 "I do always those things that please Him;" also John 11:42, "And I knew that thou hearest me always..." Mary testified concerning the Father's obedient Son, "But I know that even now, WHATSOEVER thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee." Furthermore, if an earthly monarch as Herod (Mark 6:22) was able, willing, and pleased to reward a maiden with *whatsoever* she asked, because she pleased him, how much more does our heavenly Father delight to grant us whatsoever we ask, when we do the things that please Him?

Some people call God unreasonable when He does not do what they ask Him, when He does not answer their prayer requests. However they are the unreasonable ones, for the Father has asked them to do certain things, and they have refused to obey. We want Him to disrupt the plans of the universe to do what we ask Him, but we do not want our

plans interrupted to do what He asks of us. We want to move the Hand that moves the world, but are we moving a hand to do His will? When we pray we want God to lay aside everything and give our requests special attention, but when God requests something to be done we lay it aside and do everything else. How disgruntled and impatient we get when God does not send the answer at once, yet how long-suffering is He, waiting for us to fulfill His desires which He has expressed to us through His Word, the testimony of His servants, the leading of the Holy Spirit, and the pricking of our conscience.

Oh, that we may be able to say with John, “And **WHAT-SOEVER** we ask, we receive of Him, because we keep His commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in His sight” (1 John 3:22).

### **Answered Prayer**

How important it is to know that the whole reason our Heavenly Father wants us to pray, is that we might receive an answer. If we should only take time to review His prayer-promises, we should find that this is so: “Call unto me and I will answer thee...” (Jer. 33:3a); “Ask and ye shall receive...” (John 16:24b) and many more.

Now, so much of our praying is requesting things of the Lord, that our requests seem to “pile up” in heaven, And so seldom are our prayer-answers manifested instantly, that we often forget what the thing was we asked by the time it is given: Also in the interest and zeal of a new request, we forget the old. This leads to a tendency of praying without hoping for a soon answer, and then to a further tendency of praying without expecting any answer. Unanswered prayer is no glory to God. Anybody can pray, even the devils, but not everybody receives an answer to prayer. “And call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.” (Psalm 50:15). It is to God’s glory to answer prayer, therefore it is according to His will that we should expect an answer. We can learn a lesson from the crippled man who sat and begged alms at the Gate Beautiful in the temple in Jerusalem. He asked; Peter and John told him to look on them; and it is written, “He gave heed unto them, expecting to receive something of them” (Acts 3:5). When our Father tells us to look unto Him for all things, should we not give heed unto Him, expecting Him “that spared not His own Son but delivered Him up for us all,” to “with Him also freely give us all things”?

Believing prayer prepares to receive its answer. Paul was in prison under guard, with little or nothing happening that would provoke in him a hope of deliverance. However, he wrote to Philemon, “But withal prepare me also a lodging” (as well as Onesimus whom he was

sending back) “for I trust that through your prayers” (and no doubt his own also) “I shall be given unto you” (Philemon 22).

A minister once came to Spurgeon and said dolefully, “I have been preaching for so many years, and hardly any have been converted.” “Why man alive!” exclaimed the great preacher, “you didn’t expect that every time you preached a sermon somebody would be converted, did you?” “No, of course, I didn’t expect that.” “Well, that’s why they weren’t converted.”

Let us therefore pray earnestly and expect an effectual answer EVERY TIME we pray. If we ask in His name, He will give us WHAT we ask, for He wishes to encourage us to ask definitely, and also wishes to bring to naught the criticism of the world that it was “just luck.”

### **Delayed Answers to Prayer**

Take your Bible and let us look at the Gospel of John, chapter eleven. There are many lessons there for us, but one is especially needful in this day of hurry, flurry, worry. We might call it the lesson of “Delayed Blessing.”

Lazarus is sick unto death (not final death). His sisters beseech Jesus whom they love, to come, knowing full well He would heal, Notice the difference between God’s concept of love and man’s. The sisters plead His love for their brother in order to move Him to act quickly (John 11:21); but after stating that Jesus LOVED Martha, Mary and Lazarus, the Scripture states He did what seems contrary to LOVE, “He abode two days still in the same place where He was.” Sometimes in the most urgent hour of need, when at our utmost extremity, God our Father remains unmoved, seemingly untouched by our sincere earnest cries--all because He loves us. Such love is above our thoughts and far above our ways. We wish immediate action, all circumstances point to NOW as the best time. He in infinite wisdom awaits the most opportune moment. He cannot stumble, that is, make a mistake, for in Him is no darkness at all (verse 9).

Why did our Lord delay His coming? First because, He being a jealous God desired all the glory, to whom all glory is rightly due (verse 4). “Thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory.” He foresaw He could get more glory by waiting. He saw something no one else saw, which would hinder His receiving as much glory if He came right then, as He would receive if He came later. This hindrance must be removed by Him. The greater the glory to God, the greater the miracle by God, and consequently the greater the blessing from God to the ones who are concerned. Oh! let us wait upon the Lord and be of good courage, He will strengthen our fainting hearts (Psalm 27:14).

Why did the Lord keep the anxious loved ones in suspense? Again, because He sought to provoke in them a greater trust; He sought to perfect their faith. There is at least one thing more precious to the Lord Jesus than our faith, it is--the trial of our faith (I Peter 1:7). They had hoped He would come while there was life (verses 21, 32). The world says, "While there is life, there is hope," but Jesus would have us hope in death, thus hoping against hope (Romans 4:18). When all earthly hope failed, Jesus said to Martha, "Believest thou?" Yea, the Lord would delay answer to teach us to put confidence in NO EARTHLY THING, NOR PERSON, NOT EVEN LIFE--BUT IN HIM, ALONE. He would wait until all our props are knocked out, all our bridges burned, all our wisdom tried, all our strength used, all our plans exhausted--then HE WILL COME!

Again, He would wait until the scene is set, the way prepared, for others to believe (verse 19). He would wait until some unbeliever is contacted, for He is anxious for the unsaved to receive the testimony of His works as well as His Word--that they might believe unto salvation (vs 45). Have you been waiting long? Perhaps your answer is in the "Delayed Blessing Department" (as someone said) so, "wait, I say, on the Lord."

### **Prayer With One Accord**

There seems to be in this period of our Church's history characterized by a loss of FIRST-LOVE for Jesus Christ our Lord, also a loss of that FIRST-LOVE one for the other. Let us look again at that "early Church" which so valiantly fought the good fight, ran the race with patience, and prospered; for we might be both rebuked and instructed through her example.

There are particularly six places in the Book of Acts which show this Church as being IN ONE ACCORD. Some marked event took place on each such occasion.

In Acts 1:14 we read, "These all continued *with one accord* in prayer and supplication." A great choice was to be made. Judas who transgressed, died. One must be selected to take his place and so fulfill the Scriptures. Counsel was needed, wisdom and guidance. How simply and orderly it came to pass; so different from our present day "business meetings," and all because they were WITH ONE ACCORD.

In Acts 2:1 they were all in one place WITH ONE ACCORD. In other words they were in a place where God could do something for them and with them. You know the story, how the Holy Spirit was out-poured from heaven, washing them clean, bathing their bruises, and, as a streaming Current, whirling them into and through the conflict against sin and Satan victoriously. I dare believe that if we, brothers and sisters



in the Lord, would again get into such a place WITH ONE ACCORD, we should see a renewing of the outpoured Spirit.

In Acts 2:46 we find them in Church “continuing daily WITH ONE ACCORD.” There was gladness; they had favor with all the people; and lo! and behold! “the Lord added to the Church daily such as were being saved.” What a rebuke to some of our churches today when scarcely one can say “daily,” some cannot say “weekly,” many cannot say “monthly,” and others (what a shame) are silent after a year is passed. Yea, not ONE soul saved in a year.

A minister was approached on the street by a drunkard, whom he did not recognize. “What! don’t you remember me? I’m one of your converts.” “Yes,” replied the preacher sadly, “you must have been one of MINE, if you had been one of the LORD’S converts you wouldn’t be in this condition.” Many are being added but-- are they, as in those days, added by the Lord?

In Acts 4:24 we find the Church meeting the problem of outside persecution in a triumphant way-- “they lifted up their voices to God WITH ONE ACCORD.” The result was, God answered prayer. Are we in singleness of heart in our prayer meetings? Are our prayer-meeting-prayers being answered? (For that’s the proof).

In Acts 5:12-13 we again find them united by that cord of love. Here we find God so marvelously empowering and using them, that no man dare be a “professor” unless he was a “possessor.” Our churches are flooded with labeled Christians, but they are only empty bottles--no contents. They are not CHRIST-IN Christians. Isn’t it because of our own DISCORD instead of ACCORD?

Finally in Acts 15 we have a Church debate, despute, division. How hotly this chapter opens with ARGUMENT, how sweetly it closes with ACCORD. “It seemed good unto us, being assembled WITH ONE ACCORD (verse 25).” When the children of God are yielded, they are “easy to be entreated” (James 3:17).

Beloved ones, let us dwell in unity, in one BODY in Christ, and let us so pray for the Church.

## **Public Prayer**

No doubt every one of you has been in some service when a brother arose to pray. You may or may not have known him, but oh, how your soul was stirred, your heart warmed, your whole being blessed. Heaven seemed to be brought down into the very room in which you were seated. When he stopped you wished he would have gone on and on. How uplifting, how precious, and yet how rare are such occasions. When we think of the many prayers we do hear in the course of a year, and how

many of these are just the opposite--cold, lifeless, formal, and only so many words--we are amazed and wonder--WHY? Let us recollect, let us observe, and let us attempt to establish some reasons that might be corrected in our own praying. There are four prepositions that seem to me to give a satisfying answer to our question.

First, there are those who pray *AT* others, whether it be in a large public gathering or where just two or three are met. Someone has a grudge or hard feeling toward another in the group and prays *AT* this person in an attempt to shame him or bring him to conviction. A brother who sees a fault in one who has met to pray aims *AT* this fault either to make it known publicly or to try and correct it through his prayer. Someone who is displeased with something that is going on prays *AT* the whole group or program about this thing. Such praying is, of course, recognized at once by the attitude and tone of the prayer, and to my mind is most displeasing to the Lord besides being a dampening influence upon the group.

Then, there are those who pray *TO* others. Someone wants to give out some information as to what kind of work he is doing for the Lord; or someone who was not given a part in the service wants to voice his opinions; or someone wants to tell of a fine sermon he heard, or quote some good thoughts recently gathered from a book; or someone wants to advance a favorite doctrine; or an announcement forgotten during the meeting is injected into the benediction; or someone wants to give a short exposition on some newly discovered verse of Scripture; so they pray, "Lord, thou knowest..." Truly such praying could never uplift the saints, but rather is little short of blasphemy. For the one praying is feigning to talk to God when really his mind is upon man.

Then, others pray *BEFORE* men rather than before God, as the Pharisee in Jesus' time. Trying to show off their ability to pray. Trying to make a name for themselves as spiritual. Yes, they are trying to impress others; God is far from their hearts. They are more conscious that men are listening than that God is listening. They are more anxious to choose the right words than to express a heart burden. Their prayer is just filling a place on the program.

Finally, we have those who pray *FOR* others; those who realize they stand before God in behalf of another; those who try to contact God for a present blessing upon the assembled ones; those who seek to enter into the need and get under the burden of it; those who pour out their souls unto God and cry to the only Source of Provision; those in public who so shut themselves off unto God that they seem to be making private intercession. How humble, how simple, how effectual, how powerful and how fruitful are such prayers, to the glory of God! God grant that we shall each strive to thus pray in public.

## Praying One For Another

We read in James 5:16 the following: "Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." James instructs us in practical Christianity. Let us now meditate on this verse.

"CONFESS YOUR FAULTS." I do not know of anything much harder than this firm exhortation, but "His commandments are not grievous." How necessary, yet how neglected, is this truth we shall see. Confession is most humbling and often the only way the spirit of pride can be broken. When done sincerely and frankly, it is a manifestation of true meekness and strength. Many who claim humility and try to practice it, fail in this test. To confess a fault is to admit failure in that point. Man's carnal nature is strenuously opposed to such confession (witness the sinner who prolongs repentance unto salvation), but "God giveth grace unto the humble," resisting the proud. Therefore the believer who is not obedient in this thing is yielding to the "old man," the carnal nature. Personally, I do not believe anyone who cannot confess his faults has ever realized experimentally that he is a sinner through and through, as Paul in Romans 7:18. Oh, how we dodge, how we avoid, how we put off, how we justify ourselves, when we know the Word says "Confess..." Note, too, it is "*your faults*," not those of someone else. We are so free to confess or parade the faults of others, or include others in our confession; but our own?--oh, no! "We'd never do a thing like that." He who has liberty in confessing his own is not as free to speak of another's. Again, see, it is our *faults*, our *sins*, our *shortcomings*; not our goodness, our righteousness, or our successes. That makes it doubly hard. We should be just as quick to admit our failure as to affirm our success. That's what makes the Bible so genuine, and many biographies so disappointing.

Now, this is not public confession as some think. Public confession usually is blessed when done in a repentant spirit, and only when concerning a wrong done the assembly or group before whom the confession is made. This, too, is not a means of repentance, but the result. James is referring to confession "*ONE TO ANOTHER*," for, says he, "the prayer of a righteous *MAN* availeth much." Nor is he talking of a believer's confession to an unbeliever, for the prayer of a "*righteous man* availeth much." No; it seems to be a fault between "My brethren" (verse 10), "among you in the church" (verse 14), "Brethren" (verse 19). So, who is this "righteous man" to whom the confession is made? Certainly not an appointed or designated man, as pope, priest or pastor: for then would not the Holy Spirit have mentioned him by title in verse 14? Therefore we conclude the confession to be made to either one of these: (1) the offended one, who, being not guilty, is righteous in this case and

whose prayer will avail to the healing of the offender; (2) any godly saint (if a fault against no particular one) whose fervent prayer God promises to use in overcoming the evil habit or trait. In the latter case, preferably man with man and woman with woman. At the same time, let us be warned that something is wrong with the confession or prayer if it does not *avail much*.

I just wonder how many of our faults are not overcome simply because we avoid scriptural confession of them? Wherefore, may the Lord teach us to order our ways according to this, His Word.

### **Away, Apart, Alone in Prayer**

For our meditation let us take a verse from Matthew, chapter 14, that tells of the prayer-life of Jesus our Saviour, Lord and Example. Verse 23 reads, "And when He had sent the multitudes AWAY, He went up into a mountain APART, to pray; and when the evening was come, He was there ALONE."

When we think of our small congregations and poorly attended services today, we might easily wonder what lesson could be drawn from Jesus sending the multitudes away. However, there is a lesson. No doubt there were still many in that group who had needs to be met, although Jesus had healed their sick and fed them all. Yet it was time for prayer. The world will always be needy, and there will always be room for good deeds. But if we are not careful the multitudes will rob us of spiritual life by consuming our time from prayer. There are times when we must say "No" and send the multitudes away. But note that He not only dismissed the crowds, but sent also away His disciples. There come times when even Christian fellowship can be a hindrance to our prayer life. Group prayer is essential, and there are times for it; but more important is our secret time with the Lord, when even Christian friends and loved ones must be constrained to go AWAY.

"He went up into a mountain APART." We read in the first chapter of Mark that Jesus was praying in a solitary place. He was suddenly interrupted by His disciples, and yet rebuked them not. Here I believe Jesus is teaching us that there is a time when we must get out of reach of interference. Most Christians are so busy, and have so many duties, that there must be a telephone at their elbow and a doorbell overhead or the work couldn't go on. Under such strain, the Lord does not have an utterly relaxed and attentive ear when we fellowship with Him in prayer. There must be times--yea, an habitual time--when we are free from responsibility and interference, and thus are free in our communion with the Lord.

“He was there ALONE.” The Christian’s life in some respects is a lonely life. There comes a moment when he must stand *alone*; there is a period when he must suffer *alone*; there is a time when he must serve *alone*; and to be prepared for such experiences he must learn to pray *alone*. To many professing Christians the very word ALONE carries a hollow, resounding, echoing, shrieking dread. It wasn’t easy to send the multitudes AWAY; it wasn’t easy to constrain the disciples to go! It wasn’t easy to climb the mountain APART; but to Jesus it was all necessary to be ALONE with His heavenly Father. Being alone with Jesus should be equally worthwhile and precious to us.

### The Morning Watch

The Psalmist declares, “God, Thou art my God; EARLY will I seek Thee”; and Hudson Taylor comments, “There is no time so profitably spent as the early hour given to Jesus only. Do we give sufficient attention to this hour?” I am sure that all who faithfully practice the morning watch with Jesus Christ will testify that it is the backbone of a victorious life (as far as spiritual exercises are concerned).

Let us look into the Word of God and see what it says concerning some of the Old Testament saints in connection with the morning watch: “And Abraham got up EARLY IN THE MORNING to the place where he stood before the Lord” (Genesis 19:27). Although we know that Abraham had no certain dwelling place, but lived in a tent; yet in the plains of Mamre it seems that he had a place where he would go aside with the Lord early in the morning. It was in this place that he interceded effectively for Lot.

It seemed customary for the Israelites to worship early in the day, for we read the following concerning Elkanah and his household, who went up to Shiloh yearly to worship and sacrifice unto the Lord: “And they rose up IN THE MORNING EARLY and worshiped before the Lord” (I Samuel 1:19). How much more should we, in this period of grace, show our devotion to our Lord and Saviour by seeking Him first in the morning.

Then, again, we read of Job: “...that Job...rose up EARLY IN THE MORNING, and offered burnt-offerings... Thus did Job *continually*” (Job 1:5). No wonder we find Job in the midst of affliction, blessing God. It reminds us of the grass which receives the early morning dew and is therefore able to withstand the hot rays of the sun. Then, too, this man of God was truly concerned for his children and sought the Lord EARLY for them, saying, “It may be that my sons have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts.” Father! Mother! Seek ye the Lord EARLY IN THE

MORNING, CONTINUALLY, and He will also bless your family. (See Job 42:13-17.)

Also King David, whom God called “a man after mine own heart” (Acts 13:22), communed with his God and his King before he entered into the duties of the day, saying, “My voice shalt thou hear in the MORNING, O Lord; in the Morning will I direct my prayer unto thee, and will look up” (Psalm 5:3).

Finally, our Lord Himself found it profitable to be away, apart and alone in prayer at the early morning hour, for it is written, “And in the MORNING, rising up a great while BEFORE DAY, He went out, and departed into a *solitary* place, and there prayed” (Mark 1:35).

Surely such evidence from God’s own Record will cause us to say, “EARLY will I seek Thee.” Though it be but a few minutes as a beginning, will you not follow the steps of the Savior *continually*?

### **Renewed Through Prayer**

Factory wheels spin faster, workdays grow longer, rest-days are fewer, burdens become heavier, and the whole nation is under a strain; but God’s Word is ever ready to meet the need. I have before me Isaiah 40:31, and I see in it an answer to our need.

The words “wait...renew...mount up...wings...eagles” remind me of Deuteronomy 32:11, “As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings.” Can’t you picture the little eagles resting in the nest, waiting for the mother bird who comes and feeds them? Now that their strength is renewed, she stirs them off and they mount up with wings, she remaining ever near with outstretched wings ready to swoop under and become their resting place if they grow faint and tired.

The next verse (verse 12) begins, “So the Lord alone...” Is He not tenderly wooing us to wait before Him for the renewing of our strength? Is He not teaching us that prayer is the place to renew our power? Likened to baby eagles, we are as helpless to get our own spiritual food. And likened unto the full-grown eagle, He says, “Hast thou not known, hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? ...He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might He increaseth strength” (Isaiah 40:28-29). Oh, that we would learn of Him!

Notice that according to this Scripture there is a place to wait or rest, and that is before the Lord. Also there is a place to walk or run, and that is before others. Those who wait upon the Lord when in prayer live an active Christian life; but those who walk or run when in prayer are still waiting to do something for the Lord. Brethren, let us wait long

enough before the Lord, that He might be able to renew our strength; then we shall be able to run without being weary, and walk without being faint before others.

Now there are two seasons when we are told to wait upon the Lord: "They shall run...they shall walk." The former is a time when we are quite busy for the Lord; we are very active; our days are full and long; we have an extra measure of duties and responsibilities. It is at such a time that we are counseled to come to the Lord and wait for renewal of strength, in order not to grow weary. I am convinced that the nervous breakdowns that come into Christian lives are practically all due to failure to wait for God's strength and power through prayer. What human has been more active than Paul? Yet no nervous condition set him aside. "For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet our inward man is renewed day by day" (II Corinthians 4:16). I know a Christian worker who, when his duties are increased, adds a little time to his prayer period, although the temptation and tendency are to subtract a little. If we fail to take heed to God's advice, He has no substitute way. The latter, or the "walking season," is a time when we seem to be marking time. Our duties have been cut considerably; we are far less active than we are accustomed to be; we do not seem to be getting anywhere; doors are closed that used to be open. When we are thus "walking," we must come constantly before the Lord and be encouraged, lest we grow disheartened and faint. It is written, "... men ought always to pray and not to faint" (Luke 18:1).

Therefore, whether in high or throttled down, let us be as those of whom David wrote, "They go from strength to strength; every one of them appeareth before God.... O God... hear my prayer" (Psalm 84:7-8; R.V.).

### **Prayer Closets**

Do you have a prayer closet? Do you have a secret place where you go alone and meet with your Lord? Where you can take your burdens and cast them upon Him? Where you can take your joys and share them? Where in your loneliness you can go, and always find Him home? Where He can teach you to pray?

In Matthew 6:6 we read, "But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father who is in secret; and thy Father who seeth in secret shall reward thee openly." Andrew Murray points out that this is Jesus' first public instruction on prayer to His first disciples, and that it is significant that He places such emphasis on the need of a place to pray, a prayer closet, a trysting place with the Father. A teacher must have a room in which she can teach

her pupil, and likewise there should be a place where we can meet our divine Teacher, if we would say with the disciples of old, "Lord, teach us to pray."

Jesus had such a place which we know as the "garden of prayer"; for John says (18:1, 23) "...Jesus went...where was a garden...and Judas also...knew the place; for Jesus oftentimes resorted thither with His disciples." Although the disciples went with Him, "He was withdrawn from them about a stone's cast, and kneeled down, and prayed" (Luke 22:41). This is where He fought out His great battles against the forces of evil, and won His victories for us. This teaching does not conflict with His declaration to the woman at the well in John 4:21, 23 "ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father... but the hour cometh and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in Spirit..." Of course Jesus was showing here that the Father no longer was to have an appointed place to which people had to go to worship Him. But remember that the prayer closet can be any place; it is not in any certain city, or temple, or house, or room. It is not a permanent place, but a private place that Jesus is emphasizing in Matthew. It is moveable, according as our abode changes.

We read that Jonathan Edwards spent hours in secret communion with the Lord "on the banks of the Hudson river." David Brainerd speaks of his "secret prayer...in the woods." The old sexton of Robert Murray McCheyne's church, when showing Dr. Stone the master's pulpit and study, took him to "the chair he used to sit in for prayer" with his head in his hands, saying, "That's where the master used to shed tears." Richard W. Oliver, a young man greatly used of the Lord before and after his decease, spoke of his trysting place as a spot on a hill, up in "an old oak tree."

Is your first thought when visiting or traveling, whether in pullman, bus, hotel, or home, "Where and when can I meet with the Lord today?" It has become my chief concern because I love to be alone with Him; and also because my life and my ministry are going to be fruitful or fruitless, depending on this divine appointment. I have met with Him in some peculiar places during the past fourteen years. I trust that you have a prayer closet where you meet the Lord daily.

### **Rehearsal In Prayer**

There is a very helpful prayer promise found in Proverbs which would not, on the surface, seem to apply to prayer at all. Let me quote chapter sixteen verse three, "Commit thy works unto the Lord and thy thoughts shall be established." I think the nearest approach to its meaning in the New Testament is found in Philippians 4:6, "Be anxious for



nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”

I believe that in this verse from Proverbs the Lord is teaching us to bring to Him all our plans, our schedules, our daily programs. I know it is better to go to Him for His plans, etc., but there are many things that are forced into our lives from day to day, until our days are almost planned for us. Therefore the Lord here instructs us to lay before Him all the things we are expecting to do in order that He might establish our thoughts concerning them. Of course, it would seem most reasonable that in the morning would be the best time, before we begin to do these things. The number of things we mention to Him will depend on the time we have to devote to this prayer period. George Mueller with the Lord one morning, went over about fifty things pertaining to his church alone, to say nothing of his family, his orphanages, and his own life.

I like to think of this exercise as the “Rehearsal in Prayer,” at which time we rehearse before the Lord all we are planning to do for the day, and maybe some important things for a future day. A choir rehearses many times its hymn or anthem with the director so that when the moment comes for the performance it will be all ready. The choir then will know what the director wants and what he means when he speaks through his baton. Also, the director will know what the choir can and will do at the appointed time. So, when we rehearse our plans and schedules with the Lord, He prepares us to do the right thing. He establishes our thoughts so that when the time comes to do the thing, we shall recognize His promptings and be led by His Spirit. As we go over our plans in detail He may make some changes and show us how this or that would not sound right, or look right. He may remind us of something that we would have forgotten, but which He in love remembers. Then too, as a choir director finds some numbers that do not fit and cannot be used at all, so the Lord may find some of the plans we lay before Him to be out of harmony with His will, and remove them from the repertoire of our day.

Finally, as a choir gains confidence and ease by practice, so the rehearsal in prayer brings peace and assurance. Our “thoughts become established,” and “the peace of God which passeth all understanding” becomes ours. The margin reads, “roll thy works unto the Lord...” as though our works were a burden to our thoughts, “and thy thoughts shall be established.” Yes, it is true, if we do not rehearse them with the Lord, we shall be going over and over them with ourselves, until worry, doubt and fear, make the carrying out of our plans a burden.

## Thanksgiving At Meal Time

Recently while preaching in a small rural church, I spoke of the ungratefulness of this age especially with regard to saying grace at meals. I exhorted the believers not to be forgetful of this opportunity of prayer. Later I was told that the little daughter of the superintendent of the Sunday school, insisted at the next meal in her home that her father “pray before we eat.” He had not been accustomed to doing this. What a shame that Christians must be reminded to return thanks to God for the food He gives to sustain life. I hope that none of my readers are guilty of this omission.

The writer to the Romans (1:21), shows plainly the character of this godless world, declaring among other things, that the people in it, “neither were thankful.” And again in II Timothy 3:2 we read that one thing that will characterize the last days, when there shall come perilous times, is that the people will be “unthankful.” My dear friends, we must watch and pray, and be on our guard constantly lest we be overtaken by these sins that abound in the world, and by this one so evident on every hand.

There is abundant testimony in the Scriptures that we should return thanks before meals. Paul writes Timothy that “every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving: For it is sanctified by the Word of God and prayer” (II Timothy 4:4-5). Some teach we should not eat ham; others that we should eat no meat but be vegetarians. However, thus saith the Lord, we are not to make distinctions in our foods, but accept them from Him, and through thanksgiving and prayer, have them blessed to the nourishment of our bodies.

In John 6:11 we read that “Jesus took the loaves; and when He had given thanks He distributed to the disciples, and the disciples to them that were set down; and likewise of the fishes as much as they would.” Surely this teaches us that the Lord of the earth will honor those who receive their food with thanksgiving and prayer; that He will make a little go a long ways; and that He will multiply our little until it satisfies all. Perhaps there would be fewer empty pantries and less hungry mouths if that which has been used had been received with thanksgiving.

In Luke 22:19-20 it is written, “and He took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, ...Likewise also the cup...” When Paul confirmed to us the institution of the Lord’s Supper in I Corinthians 11:24-25, he linked the thanks as a part of the ordinance. What a holy and precious reminder of our need of prayer and thanksgiving before supping. In Luke 24, Jesus resurrected, but incognito, was walking with the two distressed disciples. Upon their constraint He went into their home. Notice in verse 30 that He sat to eat with them and when He returned thanks they recognized Him, “He was known of them in

breaking of bread” (verse 35). Would people seeing you break bread recognize you as a Christian? Oh, How many believers fail to give thanks when among strangers, or among friends who do not return thanks before eating? It is said of Paul when on board a ship (Acts 27:35), “he took bread, and gave thanks to God in the presence of them all.” There were soldiers, sailors, guards, friends and enemies present, but he was unashamed. When you go into a restaurant, do you bow your head and thank God in the presence of them all? I have been present in church gatherings even in fundamental churches, where refreshments were served without thanksgiving and prayer. Oh, let us seize each opportunity to acknowledge Him and be thankful.

### Evening Prayer

Early in my Christian life I read of two men of God, who in a conference, were rooming together. When time came for bed, one kneeled to pray and the other crawled under the covers. Said the one on his knees, “Don’t you pray at night?” Replied the other, “No, I’m all prayed up.” The writer of the article was stressing the importance of being “prayed-up.” The thought was wonderful to me, and I decided that if I prayed about everything during the day I should not need to pray at night, besides I was usually very tired and sleepy and felt that prayers under such circumstances would not avail much. So I began the practice of going to bed without kneeling to pray. After several years passed and the thought about evening prayer had completely left my mind, I began to have bad dreams; I would dream of the most abominable things. I was troubled and sought the Lord for a long time about it, yet still with no prayer before bed. One night I was convicted of this sin of omission. I repented, confessed and began at once to pray at night. The evil dreams left me, praise His name.

The Psalmist said, “Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud: and he shall hear my voice” (Psalm 55:17). Notice that “evening” gets the preference, being the time of day first mentioned. No doubt we feel that because we shall be asleep, there will be no serving, no contacts with others, no responsibilities, therefore prayer is not so important. But it is at just such a time that Satan would attack us. Said Robert Murray McCheyne, “I ought not to give up the good old habit of prayer before going to bed; but guard must be kept against sleep; planning what things I am to ask is the remedy.”

Here are a few things we should remember in our evening prayers, which need not be long, such as our morning prayers: 1. Thanks for the blessings of the day. “Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise; be thankful unto him and bless his name”

(Psalm 11:4). 2. Confession of sins of commission and omission of the day. Unconfessed sin can rob you of sleep. "And whiles I was speaking, and praying, and confessing my sin, and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my supplication before the Lord my God... Yea, whiles I was speaking in prayer...Gabriel...touched me about the time of the evening oblation" (Daniel 9:20-21; also Psalm 141:2). 3. Pray for the Word of God given out during the day. Many people never stop to think until they lie down to sleep. Often they will think over the day's experience. Then can the Holy Spirit through your intercession convict. Often sinners have crawled out of bed to their knees to call upon the Lord for salvation. 4. Pray for protection against evil dreams. Our minds and souls can be soiled and carnally influenced and affected by ungodly dreams and thoughts that spring from the world, the flesh and the devil, while we lie in this subconscious, helpless state, unless we are kept by Him "who will not slumber, Behold, he that keepeth...shall neither slumber nor sleep" (Psalm 121:3-4). 5. We should ask for and claim rest. No doubt much of our unrest and sleeplessness is due to neglect of prayer and claiming of His promises. The Word witnesses that sleep is given of the Lord to rest our bodies. Let us enjoy our inheritance and profit by it. "I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep: for thou, Lord, only makest me dwell in safety" (Psalm 4:8). See also John 11:11-13. Read Psalm 3 and notice how many causes David had to be nervous, troubled, restless and sleepless. Yet he said, "I cried unto the Lord with my voice, and he heard me out of his holy hill. I laid me down and slept; I awaked; for the Lord sustained me." Brethren, many of the animals teach us that the easiest way to lie down is first to kneel.

### **Fervency In Prayer**

It has been impressed upon me to write concerning the spirit of prayer, or rather, the spirit with which we should approach our Lord in prayer. So much of our praying today is just a sing-song, a number of often repeated prayer-phrases put together, or a fumbling about for some half-quoted Scripture verses. There is not much real heartfelt burden, occasioned by a deep sense of sin, or a longing hunger for the Lord, or a pressing need, or a passion for souls. Sometimes you just wish you could stir up people to lay hold upon God and His promises as the seeking ones used to lay hold upon the horns of the altar in olden times. Although we know that we are coming before the eternal, all-powerful, all-wise, holy, loving, Creator-God, and therefore should be humble, sober, and reverent before Him, yet there is no need for weak, half-hearted, burdenless praying.

We read in Hebrews 5:7 about Jesus, “who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared.” And remember that in the garden “being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground” (Luke 22:44). Here we have a picture of what real praying is, and how far short ours falls. He was weak, and so His prayers were strong; we are more conscious of our self-righteous strength and so our prayers are weak. No wonder when His disciples heard Him praying, they asked, “Lord, teach us to pray...” (Luke 11:1). Would anyone hearing us pray, desire to ask the sameway?

Again we read of Paul referring to his intercession for the Colossians as a conflict, “For I would that ye knew what great conflict I have for you... that their hearts might be comforted...” (Colossians 2:1-2). And in Colossians 4:12 he speaks of Epaphras, “... always labouring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.” Weymouth translates this verse challengingly, “always wrestling on your behalf in his prayers..” We are in a conflict and we need to have the reality of it borne in upon us, or else our prayers will be flabby and lifeless. “We do not war after the flesh,” however, “the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds” (II Corinthians 10:3-4). “We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.... Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints” (Ephesians 6:12, 18). May the Lord open our eyes to the greatness of the conflict and the power of the enemy.

James tells us that the “fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much,” and that Elijah “prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not...and he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain” (James 5:17-18). Maybe it is our lack of righteous living that has removed the element of fervency and earnestness from our praying. Faith must work in our lives, or else it will not work in our prayers.

### **The Outpoured Heart In Prayer**

The circumstances surrounding our lives at the time of prayer, I believe, often determine the spirit with which we approach the Lord. If we have just received an answer to prayer we come in the spirit of thanksgiving. If we have just won a victory we come in a spirit of praise. If we face an enemy we may come in a spirit of fear. Now, with this in mind, think of the instruction given by David in Psalm 62:8 “ye people,

pour out your heart before him.” If you will read this Psalm, and other passages where this thought of “pouring out our hearts in prayer” occurs, you will find that the circumstances that provoke such a spirit before the Lord is that of deep sorrow, affliction, or persecution.

We should praise the Lord for encouraging us to pour out our hearts before Him. To me this is a thrilling invitation. It means He wishes us to form the deepest and most confidential friendship with Him. Very few times in our lives do we pour out our hearts; and scarcely ever do we have more than one person, if that many, with whom we have this freedom. So many are uninterested, or unsympathetic, or unreasonable, or unable to help, or too busy; and some have deceived us, or betrayed our confidences, or used our words against us, or let our secrets affect our fellowship, that our hearts are extremely cautious, and we prefer to bear the pain alone rather than suffer further insult or injury. It is the Lord alone who can fully and constantly meet the requirements of one unto whom we can pour out our hearts. Is He that kind of Friend to you? “Learn of me, and ye shall find rest unto your souls” (Matthew 11:29).

Now, pouring out the heart, to me, means to speak with utter abandon, almost bordering on carelessness. In other words, just to pull out the plug that is holding back our pent-up feelings, and empty them out, draining the heart, and without regard as to how the thoughts are expressed. At other times we should choose our language, guard our feelings, and check our thoughts, but not when we are pouring out our hearts. Rather do we cry out as a woman in the pangs of delivery. (Isa. 26:16), or as a mother whose babes “faint for hunger” (Lam. 2:19).

We may even complain when pouring out our hearts, for when Hannah “poured out my soul before the Lord” (I Sam. 1:15), Eli thought she was drunken, but she replied, “out of the abundance of my complaint and grief have I spoken hitherto.” Although the Scriptures warn against murmuring and complaining, yet if we have a complaint, like Hannah, we are encouraged to pour it out unto the Lord.

We may even disregard His will for the moment. Even Jesus who “poured out His soul unto death,” when He was praying in the garden, was in such agony of spirit that He disregarded the will of His Father for the moment, saying, “remove this cup from Me.” After He had unburdened His soul and spoken the desire which was on His heart, then, relieved, He prayed “Nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done.”

After all, the Lord sees our hearts and the thoughts therein, whether they are good or bad, so why not tell Him the whole thing just as we feel about it? This blessed privilege is accorded us when we are exhorted to, “pour out your heart before Him.”

## Prayer During Trials

The Book of James gives us some wonderful and practical instruction about something that is common to us all and that is, trial or testing. Oh, that we might apply the “grace wherein we stand” in order to learn the precious spiritual lessons He longs to teach us, through tribulation. Let us meditate on James 1:2-5.

In the first place, we are to find pleasure in testings, yea, even in many trials. “My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations.” To the world, to human reasoning, and to the carnal Christian, this will seem foolish, but “the foolishness of God is wiser than men,” always. To gain the greatest benefit from trials we must count them “all joy,” and not murmur, nor complain, nor become impatient and irritable. This we can do only through the grace of God, through Christ in us, empowering us. A minister once said to Sophie the “scrub and preach woman,” “I wish I had your patience but my nerves are so unstrung I have no patience.” “Well,” she replied, “you can’t borrow from me; I haf none to spare; but you read your Testament right you get it.” “What do you mean? I do read it right. I read it in Greek and English.” “But, brutter, you don’t read it right. Brutter Paul says, ‘Glory in tribulations.’ Now G-L-O-R-Y don’t spell growl; yet when trial comes you growl like a dog over a bone. If you want patience, glory in tribulation; and Paul says that ‘tribulation worketh patience’; that’s the way to get it; ‘und patience experience; und experience hope; und hope maketh not ashamed.’ See how you go up those steps into a better insperience when you take the first step und glory instead of growl?”

In the second place we are to show patience in trial. Although the test itself is for the purpose of working patience, yet we are to “Let patience have her perfect work.” Unless we yield to the hand of the Husbandman, the pruning will be unfruitful; unless we submit to the skill of the Surgeon the operation will be unsuccessful. We must wait as long as He wishes to work. It may mean an interruption in our plans, some inconveniences, some losses, some sufferings, but we must endure peacefully, even with joy. Immediate healing or deliverance is not always best for us spiritually. Remembering the “end of the Lord” (James 5:11) will help us, “that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.” Notice that we are to have many and varied (“divers”) trials in order to develop full patience in each part of our personality (“be perfect”), and thus perfect all parts (“be entire”). Until we have learned to be patient “toward all men,” and under all circumstances, we have not become mature believers, “perfect and entire, wanting nothing.”

And in the third place, we must resort to prayer in our trials. This promise “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God” has been given especially for those in trial, and especially for those who would ac-

cept the test with pleasure and endure with patience. Even though we do not feel like praying, and often think of it as a last resort when we unexpectedly “fall into divers temptations,” yet it is the key that enables us to conduct ourselves properly through the test, and bring us out with spiritual profit. We are not to pray for removal of the test, but for wisdom to stay under it, unless in the Holy Spirit’s wisdom we should be thus led to ask. Who can rejoice that a trial has come, who can glory in the midst of fire? We are not sufficient for these things, we must pray for wisdom. Who can be at peace under prolonged suffering, who can be patient, longsuffering, and kind, when his faith is being stretched out beyond human endurance? Though the spirit is willing the flesh is weak. We must pray for the wisdom which we lack. It is written of Madam Guyon who suffered much in body, soul and spirit, “In general, she thought it best to bear her domestic trials in silence. As a woman of prayer and faith, she regarded them as sent of God for some gracious purpose, and was somewhat fearful of seeking advice and consolation from any other than a divine source.”

The Father who sends much tribulation promises a liberal supply of wisdom that we “always having all sufficiency in all things may abound to every good work.” He pledges to give, to give all, to give to all; and though we through many conflicts have to ask repeatedly for much grace, yet He “upbraided not; and it shall be given him.” Spurgeon said “Prayer is God’s rod which fetches forth streams of blessing from the rock of affliction.”

### **Unwearied In Prayer**

If there is anything of which we should be constantly reminded, it is to “continue in prayer” (Colossians 4:2). Prayer is the one exercise that is most vital to the Christian’s life and ministry. In spite of the many exhortations and examples of the fruitfulness of prayer given both in the Bible and in biographies of saints greatly used of the Lord, yet Christians fail to pray. Many have confessed to me that they have a defeated prayer life, yet they do nothing about it.

Weymouth’s rendering of the verse mentioned above is very striking, “Be earnest and unwearied in prayer, being intent on it, and on your giving of thanks.” We may become weary of other things, but never of prayer. We may become weary while praying, but never of praying. Yes, we shall often be weary while praying, if we be among those who never grow careless about praying. You may ask, “Is there any use praying when you are so tired that you cannot get anything out of it?” Yes, by all means, and for more reasons than one. We should not always pray just to get something out of it, but rather because we love Him, and for



the sake of others. There may be times when we cannot pray extendedly, but we can pray. Then remember too that we are creatures of habit, and because we are fallen creatures, we form evil habits more easily than good habits. If we postpone prayer today because we are tired, (and oh, how often we are these days!) we are most likely to postpone it again tomorrow, and so on. Then again, I dare say, we can never pray without getting something out of it ourselves, whether we are aware of the profit or not. Notice that the reverse is always true, that if we neglect prayer, we lose something by it whether we feel the loss or not.

A professor of mine once told us that often he would kneel to pray, and be so tired that he would fall asleep. "But," said he triumphantly, "when I awoke I would always continue where I left off." This is the untiring determination we need to defeat the enemy of our testimony and of our ministry.

Remember that in the parable of the "Unjust Judge" (Luke 18), Jesus taught "that men ought always to pray, and not to faint." There He teaches us that He would much rather be wearied by our prayerfulness than by our prayerlessness. Of course, we know He is there instructing Israel that if she would persevere in prayer, He, the just Judge, would speedily deliver her. "Yet," He concludes, (and I paraphrase), "when the Son of Man does finally (after a long time) come, shall He find anyone on earth among Israel who has faith enough in prayer to be still persevering in it?" However, the principle is the same and applies to us, "Do we have faith enough in prayer to continue with unwearied persistence for others, as well as for ourselves?"

In closing, "consider Him, lest ye be wearied and faint" (Hebrews 12:3). Think upon His exhortations to us upon prayer; His strength promised to us for prayer; and His example before us of unwearied praying, from the days of His earthly ministry even until the present hour. Such considerations will provoke us not to faint, but to have faith.

### **Prayer For Ourselves**

How subtle is the enemy of our souls! Truly he is a deceiver and a master at his work. We would do well to remember that although "greater is He that is in you, than he that is in the world" (I John 4:4), yet greater is he that is in the world than you. Even Michael the archangel realized that he was no match for the devil, but the Lord alone could overcome him (Jude 9). However, Paul said that we need not be ignorant of his devices (II Corinthians 2:11), lest he gain the advantage over us.

Now, I believe, there is one thing in which Satan has gained the advantage over many Christians, and unless we be on guard, he will also

take us captive. This particular thing pertains to prayer for ourselves. The temptation is that we should not spend much time praying for ourselves, but rather for others. To pray for self, some would convince us, is utter selfishness; rather should we pray for others alone, and then self would be overcome. They tell us that the best way to find victory over self is to be lost in concern for others. Nothing could be farther from the truth; nothing would bring defeat sooner. Let us look at the Scriptures.

In II Timothy 4:16 Paul warns Timothy, "Take heed unto thyself." Judgment, cleansing, appropriation, faith, victory, must all begin in our own hearts. In such things it is not evil to pray for self first, rather is it the divine order. For if we regard iniquity in our hearts, the Lord cannot hear our intercession for others. Jesus said, "first cast the beam out of thine own eye" (Matthew 7:5), and again, "first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come" to the altar (Matthew 5:24). We must pray with David, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (Psalm 139:23-24). Then shall we be in the attitude of prayer for others.

George Mueller said that his first concern in prayer each morning was to see that his own soul was happy in the Lord. Charles G. Finney said the proper way to pray for a revival is to start praying for ourselves, saying, "our own personal lives are to be searched with candles and every sin abandoned - Prayer is not to change God, but to change us." Andrew Murray points out that in the Lord's prayer recorded in John 17, Jesus prays first for himself and then for others. Says he, "It is only when your own personal relation on this point, like Christ's, is clear with God, you will have power to intercede for those around you."

Therefore, my dear friends, let not Satan beguile you and me into so much thought of others that we completely forget our relationship to the Lord. We must not be so busy feeding others that we starve ourselves; we must not be so anxious for a spotless Church that we ourselves become unclean; and we must not be so concerned with interpreting Christ (Luke 24:21) that we fail to see Him ourselves. But rather let us say, "purge me, wash me, make me. Then will I teach transgressors thy ways" (Psalm 51:7-13). Also let us determine with Paul "that I may know Him," then we can with him say, "Brethren, be followers together of me" (Philippians 3:10 and 17). In this manner let us pray.

## **Meditation In Prayer**

I am convinced that there is a great difference between reading, studying and meditating. All will agree that reading and meditating are widely separated, but too often study and meditation are confused, not only as to method but also as to result.

Meditation is not gathering information; nor is it arranging material into some form; nor is it learning or committing to memory obtained or arranged material. Rather is it taking a single fact, truth or statement, and reflecting upon its meaning; it is thinking through to a clear, full, and satisfying understanding; it is viewing a thing from all angles; it is relating it to life with an honest realization of the consequences; it is making a sincere application or appropriation.

Study leads men to conclusions; meditation leads men to convictions. Men will argue and strive for their conclusions; men will hazard their lives and even die for their convictions. A view, opinion, or theory may change with further study; a conviction arrived at through meditation on truth, is unwavering, unchanging, firm and enduring. We study for serving (II Timothy 2:15): We meditate for living (Joshua 1:8). I have seen students go through Bible schools and graduate, well-prepared to teach and preach and work for the Lord, and yet sorely lacking conviction and assurance and power, because there has been study without meditation. Growth in stature of mind without growth in stature of the inner-man, or growth in favor with man without growth in favor with God results from study without meditation.

Men can study almost anywhere. Meditation requires a quiet, peaceful atmosphere (Genesis 24:63 and Psalm 63:6; 119:148). Meditation requires much patience, faith, and prayer, because it does not yield fruit as rapidly as study. Meditation taxes the mind and requires mental discipline and concentration more than study. For these reasons and others, I believe we as believers would much rather study than meditate, and I dare say, many would rather read than study. Therefore knowledge in the Church of Christ today is widespread and deep, but convictions are shallow and rare.

The Scriptures set forth three main themes for meditation, namely; 1. Upon the Lord Himself (Psalm 63:6). 2. Upon the Word of the Lord (Psalm 1:2). 3. Upon the works of the Lord (Psalm 77:12). Certainly we can find no greater themes for meditation than these, the Lord and all that has to do with Him. And if we be as well repaid as was the Psalmist, the Sweet Singer of Israel, the King David, the Man after God's Own Heart, then truly such meditation brings incomparable and eternal rewards.

To mention some of these benefits derived from meditation, I quote: "Make thy way prosperous," and "shalt have good success"

(Joshua 1:8); “And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper” (Psalm 1:3); “My soul shall be satisfied” and “my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips” (Psalm 63:5); “thou hast made me wiser than my enemies” and “I have more understanding than all my teachers” (Psalm 119:97-99).

Therefore, in the words of the apostle Paul, let us “meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly unto them; that thy profiting may appear unto all” (I Timothy 4:15).

### **Shining Glory Through Prayer**

The other night I saw a most interesting demonstration. An acquaintance of mine showed us some stones he had which were ordinary in shape and unattractive in color. Then he had all the lights turned out in the room and subjected these stones to the rays of a lamp. The stones became fluorescent and began to glow. But the part that captivated me was the fact that when the lamp was turned off the stones continued to glow for a long time. I thought, “How much Christians are like those stones!” We are called to exhibit a borrowed ray, just as the stones I saw. “For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (II Corinthians 4:6). Sinners will get their first glimpse of God’s glory through Jesus Christ, or they will never see the glory of God at all; and we are called to reflect His light.

This text came to me, “And they looked unto Him, and were radiant...” (Psalm 34:5a R.V.) to remind me that as the stones had to be subjected to the ray of the lamp and absorb its light before they could reflect it, so must we sit at the feet of Jesus in prayer in order that we may absorb some of His light which is to be reflected through us. Yea, the longer we wait before Him, the brighter will be the glow of our countenances, and the longer will the glow last. And of course since the glow which shines from us does not originate in us, we must constantly repair to the Source, the Son of Righteousness. Could this be the explanation for so many dull, sullen, unhappy Christians about us? Could this explain the light, shallow laughter of the Christian who knows he should be happy, but has not been to the proper Source to obtain an abiding spiritual glow? They looked unto the Lord and were lightened.

It is written in Luke 9:29 concerning Jesus, “And as He prayed, the fashion of His countenance was altered, and His raiment was white and glistening.” I am sure that we too, can have an altered countenance if we wait much before Him in prayer. Some people pay large sums of money and suffer painful operations in order to alter their countenances.

ces. The intense desire, of course, is to beautify the face. How much more simple and lasting is the Lord's way of beautifying His children. "But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the spirit of the Lord" (II Corinthians 3:18). The Lord does not promise to take a homely face and remould its physical features into one of beauty, but He will so flood the homely face of a Christian with His glory, that it will be far more attractive than the natural beauty in the face of the sinner.

"And it came to pass, when Moses...came down from the mount, that Moses knew not that the skin of his face shone by reason of his speaking with Him. And when Aaron and all the children of Israel saw Moses, behold, the skin of his face shone..." (Exodus 34:29-30 R.V.). So let us speak much with Him.

### **Jeremiah The Intercessor**

Jeremiah was a great man of God. Not only was he a bold prophet, but also a true intercessor. In chapter 18 verse 20 we have a good definition of an intercessor as he testifies from his own life, in prayer to the Lord, "Remember that I stood before Thee to speak good for them." He is, of course, referring here to his priestly intercession for the rebellious children of Israel.

Notice his first clause, "I stood before Thee--." I do not believe this standing refers to his position in prayer, but rather to his position as between the Lord and the transgressors, bridging the gap that they could not cross. He had been one with them in sin so understood their hearts, and he had been sanctified from his sin, so he knew the Lord was their only hope. Therefore he "stood before" the Lord in behalf of the wayward Israelites. However, I do believe the word "stood" speaks to us of coming to rest or taking time. It does require time to be an intercessor and we should not be in a hurry and rush through our prayers when before the Lord in intercession. In Isaiah 40:31, "wait" expresses the attitude of our supplication, and "walk" or "run" the attitude of our service. But many Christians have it in reverse, for they pray on the run, and are still waiting to serve.

Now read his second clause, "to speak good for them." When interceding we should not be praying for ourselves. Neither should we be thinking of any particular profit we shall obtain from praying for others. So great should be their need upon us that it becomes our particular concern. Again, we read that he prayed "for" them. Jeremiah spoke with great boldness and fearlessness when he stood before the people. They had rejected the way of the Lord, made light of His Word, and forsook Him to worship other gods that were no gods. They were

living in sin, satisfying their lusts to the fullest. Therefore his message as a prophet was “against” them. But when he interceded, it was “for” them. What a contrast of emotions must dwell in the breast of the one who would witness and intercede. On the one hand, when facing the sinner, he must show him that he is guilty and the wrath of God is upon him. On the other hand, when standing before God, he must plead, “to turn away Thy wrath from them.”

However, in the following verses we read that Jeremiah began praying not for them, but very much against them, that their children be delivered up, their wives bereaved of their husbands, the men put to death, and their young men slain. This all seems contradictory. What has crept in? From verses 18 to 23 we find that the people have taken the message not as from the Lord but as from the prophet. Therefore they begin to persecute him with their tongues and they threaten him with death. Jeremiah has taken this opposition, not as against the Lord who sent him and whose message he delivered, but as personally against himself. Therefore, he is for the moment disturbed, and allows his feelings to affect his prayer. Let us never allow any words or actions of others against us to influence us to cease praying for them or begin praying against them, for it is written, “pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you” (Matthew 5:44).

### **Watching And Witnessing**

In the midst of one of His messages to Jeremiah against the children of Judah, the Lord turned to the prophet and said, “I have set thee for a tower and a fortress among my people, that thou mayest know and try their way” (Jeremiah 6:27). From the very beginning of the book, Jeremiah tells us how the Lord instructed him and kept reminding him of the work he was to do. So will He set us in our respective places, and instruct us as to His purpose in putting us there, if we will but yield ourselves to His will and service. Now let us examine the message of the Lord to His servant.

The first figure the Lord uses as He teaches Jeremiah His ways, is that of a tower, saying, “I have set thee for a tower...among my people, that thou mayest know...their way.” Towers were used on city walls, garisons, and in vineyards. There the guards, the watchmen, the keepers, stayed to watch over and protect a certain area of land against the enemy. Jeremiah was to be a tower, not in a tower as one who can go out again, but a permanent watchman to observe the people. He was set among the Lord’s people to watch (not to spy) and know their ways. Thus, by close observation he could tell from the conduct and character of the people, just when the enemy was attacking, where he was invading, and what the

nature of the attack. In this way he would be equipped to intercede for them, as he reported to the Lord of the vineyard the working of the foe. Then too, he would have evidence at his hand when warning the laborers and servants of their enemies. So are we called upon to be towers among the Lord's people. We must ever "watch and pray." Surely we remember how often Jesus thus exhorted His disciples. We must watch for indifference, coldness, lust, worldliness, fruitlessness, selfishness, unbelief, and all forms of neglect, as well as pride, presumption, and false doctrine. These little foxes and ravening wolves delight to destroy the Lord's vineyard. Are you a faithful tower? Watch and pray without ceasing.

Then the second figure the Lord Jesus uses is that of a fortress, saying "I have set thee for... a fortress among my people, that thou mayest... try their way." A fortress to try their way. Of course a fortress is a defensive embattlement of stone or some such material, hard and heavy enough to resist attacks of the foe. So the Lord was intimating that Jeremiah would be severely attacked, but He would make him strong enough to stand. Yes, saith the Lord "For, behold, I have made thee this day a defenced city, and an iron pillar, and brasen walls... and they shall fight against thee; but they shall not prevail against thee; for I am with thee" (1:18-19). And so it was that Jeremiah's testimonies stirred up many people against him, from kings to priests and people, but terrific as were their persecutions, the Lord made him to stand. Thus he was used to try the way of the people and to make manifest their carnal, rebellious natures. And thus will the Lord use anyone who would dare to witness boldly for Christ and stand true to convictions based on His Word. A silent or compromising Christian could never be a fortress of the Lord.

### **Power Through Prayer**

Turning to the fourth chapter of Acts, we notice that the early disciples maintained a forceful testimony, as shown in verses 23-31. They had been threatened by the council and charged not to speak any more in Jesus' name. But they were not frustrated; rather did they realize that the more powerful the opposition, the more forceful must be their testimony.

So their recourse was prayer. They poured out their hearts to their Lord, telling Him of the threats, the evil work of their enemies, and called for more grace. No, they did not ask for less opposition, nor for a removal of their foes, but for more courage and boldness to proclaim the wondrous story. They prayed for God to stretch out His hand and do mighty things in the very name of Jesus whom they were warned not to preach. "Men ought always to pray and not to faint," and so in the face of these threats, they, conscious of their weakness, cried out to the Lord.

He heard and answered, shaking the building with His strength, and shaking the city with His disciples. Oh, that we would learn this lesson, that power comes through prayer. So many try to witness in their own weak way, and because of a little offense, a bit of ridicule, a bit of persecution, draw into a shell and become silent, instead of going to the Lord in prayer and claiming His provision of the Holy Spirit and power for witnessing. "But ye shall receive power after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you; and ye shall be witnesses unto me, both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

Do you fear the faces and frowns of men? Have they kept your mouth closed about Jesus? Go tell the Lord about it. Persist in prayer until you prevail. It is the will of God that you have power for witnessing, and He will give it to you. The chorus, "He cannot fail, for He is God; He cannot fail, He's pledged His Word; He cannot fail, He'll see you through; He cannot fail, He'll answer you," is true. Have you been rebuked for saying a word for the Lord at the office? Have you been criticized at the church for doing personal work? Have you been told that you will drive people away by approaching them about their souls? Take these threats to the Lord and ask for more boldness. It is the forceful testimony that brings conviction, when that force comes through the Holy Spirit by prayer.

Be sure of this: it does not matter how timid, or weak, or incapable you are naturally, for it is His strength, not your fitness, that He uses, "...and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty..." (I Corinthians 1:27). Just offer yourself to Him and pray. I cannot explain how He does it, but I know He does. He did it for me; He'll do it for you. But notice carefully that He gave them power not to argue or fight, but to preach the Word. Their boldness was for witnessing only. So let us not go around complaining about our weakness and the enemy's strength, but let us pray till the boldness comes and be forceful testimonies for Him.

### **A Profitable Prayer Meeting**

How I would love to have been at that prayer meeting held in Jerusalem as recorded in Acts 4:24-31. I am sure that my prayer life would be different, my prayers would be different, and any prayer meetings in which I might have a part would be different. The only influence, however, that service can exert upon us today, is the record we have in the Scriptures, illumined and impressed upon our hearts by the Holy Spirit. Let us read verse 31 and notice three results of that prayer meeting.



The first result was a Shaken Place, “And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together;...” Praise God for the power of prayer; but when will we learn to use this power? We see here that the first place to feel the effects of their praying was not the place where they had been imprisoned, nor the place where they had been tried and threatened, but the place “where they were assembled together” in prayer. When believers begin to pray in real earnestness, and with true faith that clings for an answer at any cost, be sure that the first ones God will deal with are the ones praying. Again and again have I seen it work in my ministry. I go into a town where there is little or no evangelism; into a church where only a handful are concerned; yet when this handful of consecrated and concerned Christians get on their knees to intercede, God’s hand moves and shakes these very ones. He deals with them to remove “...those things that are shaken... that those things which cannot be shaken may remain” (Hebrews 12:27). If you wish to see God shake your country, your state, your city, your community, your church, your family, then be prepared to let Him shake you first and the place where you pray. I remember when I was a boy how often I had to shake the ashes from our stove in a sieve, in order to save out the good coal to burn again. Even so the Lord would shake us to refine us, and remove from our lives the dross and save and strengthen the spiritual graces. Who would not be willing to have his ashes shaken out when the exchange is for beauty (Isaiah 61:3), an infilling of the Spirit, and power (Acts 4:31)?

The second result was a Spirit-filled People, “...and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost...” Bishop Moule notes a difference between being “full” of the Holy Spirit, and being “filled” with the Holy Spirit, as shown in Acts, saying “...it thus results that the same man might in one respect be full while in another he needed to be filled.” There is a time when a Christian by definite decision of faith becomes full of the Holy Spirit. This is a permanent relationship of the believer to the Holy Spirit, which affects his daily life and service, every day, and which does not vary being based upon a definite act of faith in His promise. But being “filled” is a special experience which comes to the believer, for a special need or act of service. We know that at least two of these gathered in prayer had become full of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, but here they are filled to testify during a special period of persecution and testing. This filling comes through prayer. God does not expect nor intend for us to meet the enemies of the Gospel and our souls in our own ability or power. To do so would spell defeat. But He is ready and willing to furnish through the filling of the Holy Spirit all who wait upon Him in fervent petition.

The third result shown here is a Speaking Power, "...and they spake the Word of God with boldness... and with great power gave the apostles witness..." This was a direct answer to their prayer, "...grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy Word." Some have boldness in the things they speak, but no boldness to speak the things they leave unsaid. This power God gave was not only manifestations in connection with the words spoken, but also grace to speak the words they were threatened to omit (Acts 4:18). This should be the prayer of every preacher, teacher, and evangelist, as well as everyone who witnesses for Christ. We are often tempted to leave unsaid the truth, if we think it will offend others, or hurt our position or welfare (see John 16:6-7). This power to speak in the name of Jesus comes also through earnest supplication.

### **Praying Forth Laborers**

There is a great dearth of Gospel ministers in all branches of Christian work today, no doubt, the same as in the days of Jesus' earthly ministry. "The harvest truly is plenteous, but the laborers are few." However, the Lord Jesus has given us the means of supplying this need and remedying this failure, when He said, "Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that He will send forth laborers into His harvest" (Matthew 9:38).

We may hold consecration services, and have the best of speakers to invite believers to yield their lives for Christian service, but this will not avail unless we "Pray...the Lord of the harvest." We may have Youth Rallies and challenge young people to give all for full time service, but this will not meet the need unless we "Pray...that He will send forth." We may have missionary conferences and present the needs of the mission field in a most heart rending manner, but this too will fail unless we "Pray ...laborers into His harvest." This is God's method, God's way, and God's will; no other way will substitute or succeed. Hudson Taylor early in his ministry was thus taught by the Holy Spirit, and has left us even until this day a triumphant testimony of how prayer prevails in calling, equipping, sending, placing, and sustaining laborers in the Gospel ministry to the glory of God and with much fruit.

But not only is this text to apply for the supply of missionaries, we should also pray for the Lord to raise up pastors. Are they not laborers in the harvest? May every empty church or pastor-less flock remind us to pray for the Chief Shepherd to raise up under shepherds. So should we pray for teachers in our Sunday schools, instead of grabbing anyone who is willing. Deacons and trustees are laborers (even though they may work with their hands), and we must use God's method of obtaining

them. Surely we should have less trouble with our church musicians, the choir leader, the organist, the soloist, if we prayed that they be God-called and God-sent. And I am positive that evangelism would not be such a stench in the nostrils of the church today if we were faithful to pray for evangelists to be raised up, gifted of God, and so ordained for this ministry.

Remember that Jesus our Saviour and our blessed Example prayed all night before choosing the twelve to be leaders of the infant Church. Also recall that the apostles when filling a vacant office held by Judas Iscariot, prayed "Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, shew whether of these two Thou hast chosen" (Acts 1:24). Again, it was through prayer and intercession that the Holy Spirit spoke to the Early Church saying, "Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them" (Acts 13:2). Was it not the vision of a man praying for helpers that moved Paul to Macedonia; and was it not into a prayer meeting that Paul and his Gospel-ministering groups first took the message to Europe? Therefore, let us not forget this all important prayer request of the Lord of the harvest.

### Prayer For His Coming

If ever there was a time in the world's history when we needed a King to reign in righteousness, it is now. In chapter 22 of Revelation it is recorded three times of the Lamb that sitteth upon the *throne* that He said, "I come quickly" (verses 7, 12, 20). Then, as if in answer to these three statements of the promise, there is in verse 17 a triple response, "Come." Let us note this response, for it directly affects you and me.

*"And the Spirit says, Come."* We read in Romans 8:27 that the Spirit maketh intercession according to the will of God. Therefore, we have further testimony that it is the will of God for Jesus to come, And we should have confidence that He will come again. The Holy Spirit prays for Jesus coming because (1) the truth of all prophetic revelation inspired by Him shall be made manifest, and God be glorified; (2) the day of glory shall be issued in for the saints, for whom He intercedes (Romans 8:27); (3) He Himself shall no longer be grieved, or quenched. Truly it is the Holy Spirit's prayer that inspires and energizes anyone who prays, "Come."

*"And the bride says, Come."* Here we have the Body of Christ, the Church, praying as a *unit* for the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. The bride prays for Jesus' coming because (1) she shall then be complete: the bride will become the wife (Revelation 19:7); (2) it shall be the day of her complete redemption and perfection (Ephesians 5:27); (3) she shall ever be with the Bridegroom: at last the Husband (I Thes-

salonians 4:17). Oh, that there might be more united prayer for His coming; more public as well as private crying to Him, "Come!"

*"And let him that heareth say, Come."* Here is an exhortation for the individual ("him") member of the Church and Body of Christ to pray, "Come." How few of God's children are really praying this prayer! Some, of course, have not been taught of His coming, but many who know fail to thus request it. I have heard some claim they cannot so pray because they have unsaved loved ones. To such an one I would say, "My brother, dare you claim to be more longsuffering than God? Read II Peter 3:4-9, 15. Would you love your neighbor more than your Lord (II Timothy 4:8)? Would you fail to heed His exhortation in this verse, 'And let him that obeyeth say, Come?'" John was called the "beloved disciple," and surely he must have had unsaved loved ones and friends. Yet he, to whom was just given the terrific but wonderful revelation of woes, dooms and judgments, said, "EVEN SO, come, Lord Jesus." "Behold he which pierced Him: and all kindreds of the earth shall WAIL because of Him. EVEN SO, AMEN" (Revelation 1:7).

If believers would pray this prayer, then the unsaved would be greatly and definitely affected, For, to enter a church or a prayer meeting and hear the Bride earnestly beseeching Jesus to come; to meet individual believers who are loving, looking and praying for His appearing, would move the unsaved to soon come to the soon-coming Saviour and Lord. "Him that is athirst will come." Moreover, the love for condemned ones would burn more fervently in our own hearts. Therefore let us be faithful in praying for His coming.